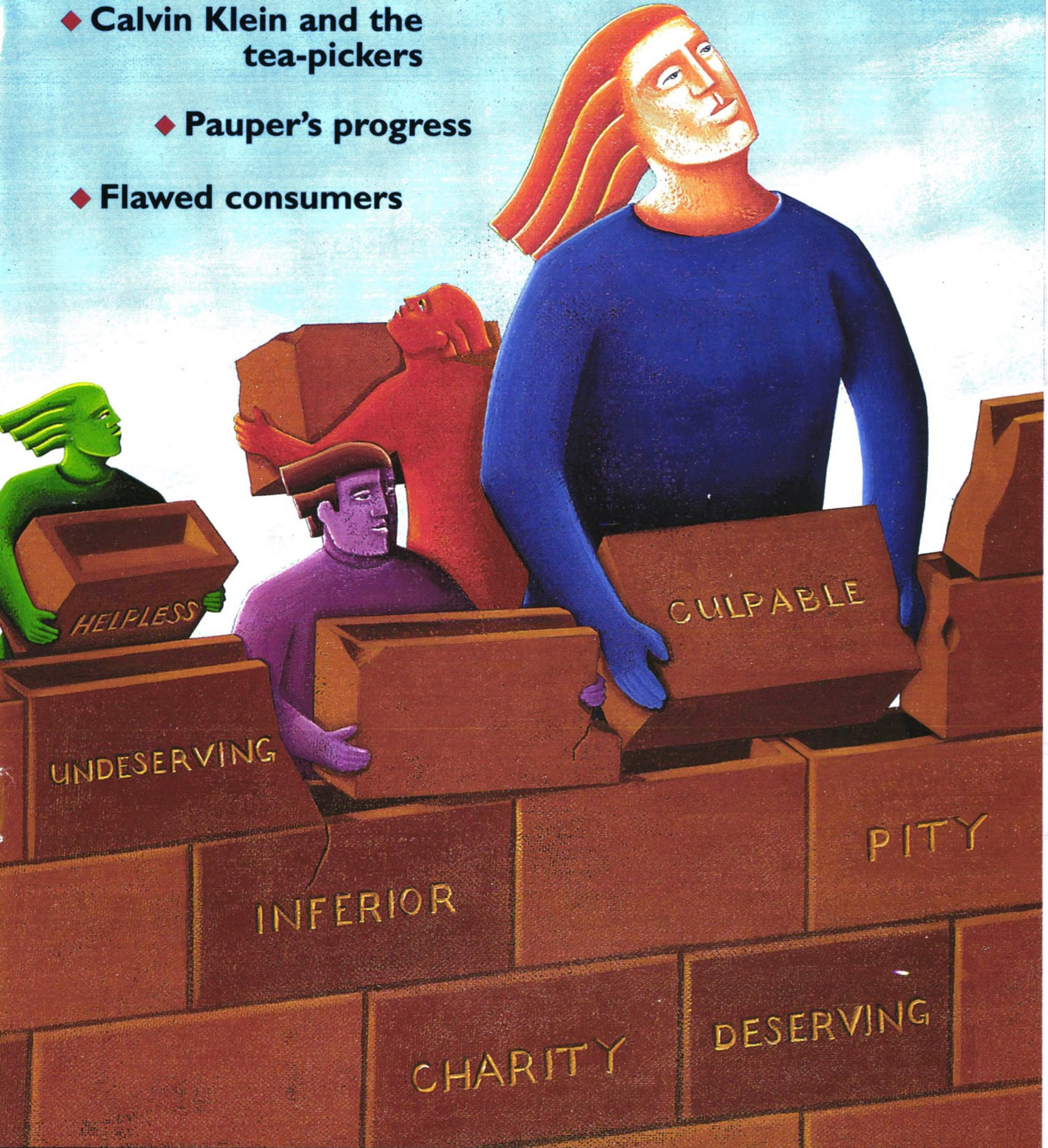
No. 310 / MARCH 1999

THE NI
NEW INTERNATIONALIST

Poverty
dismantling the myths

- ◆ Calvin Klein and the tea-pickers
- ◆ Pauper's progress
- ◆ Flawed consumers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◆ Independent thinkers – how to beat the bullies in Papua New Guinea
◆ In defence of the witch-hunt – new paths of justice in South Africa
◆ Clipping claws – South America's 'Operation Condor' killers are captured
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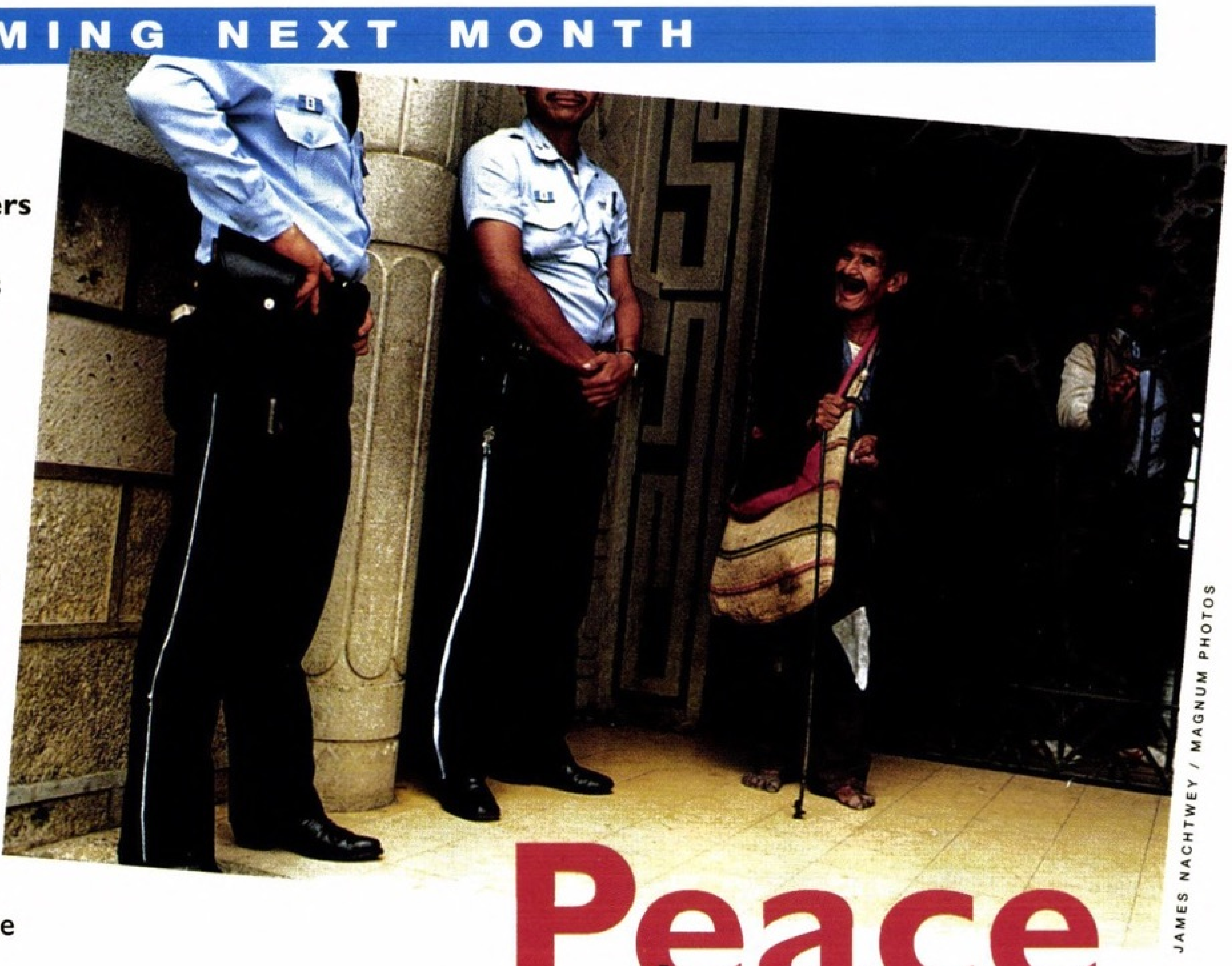

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The New Internationalist exists to report on the issues of world poverty and inequality; to focus attention on the unjust relationship between the powerful and powerless in both rich and poor nations; to debate and campaign for the radical changes necessary within and between those nations if the basic material and spiritual needs of all are to be met; and to bring to life the people, the ideas and the action in the fight for world development.

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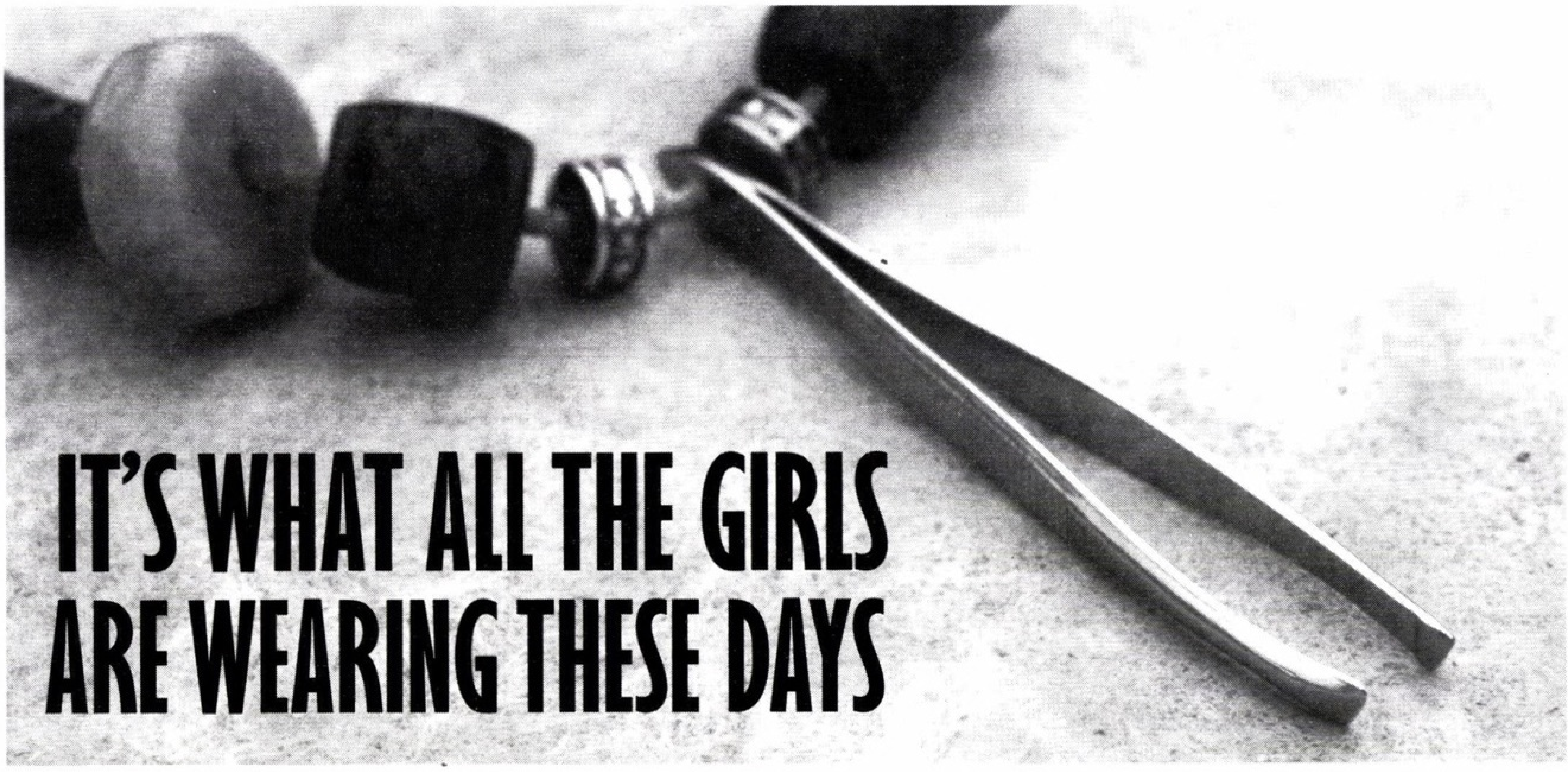

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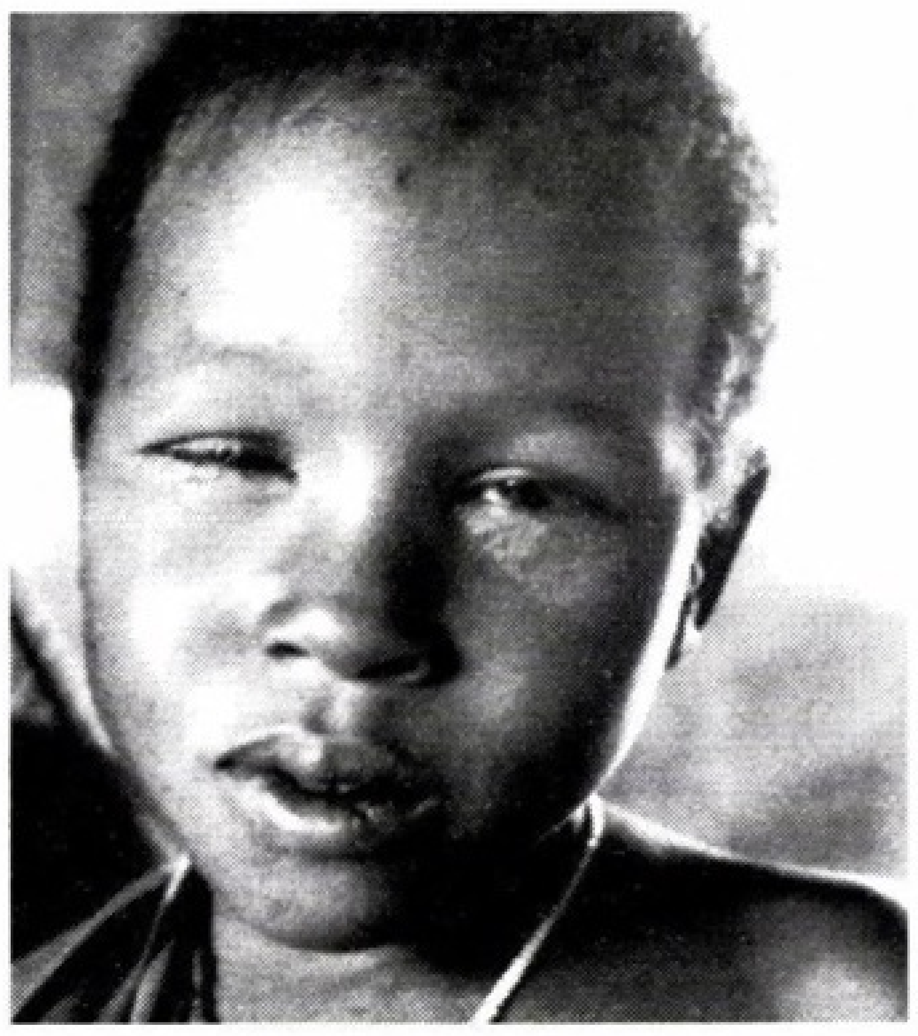

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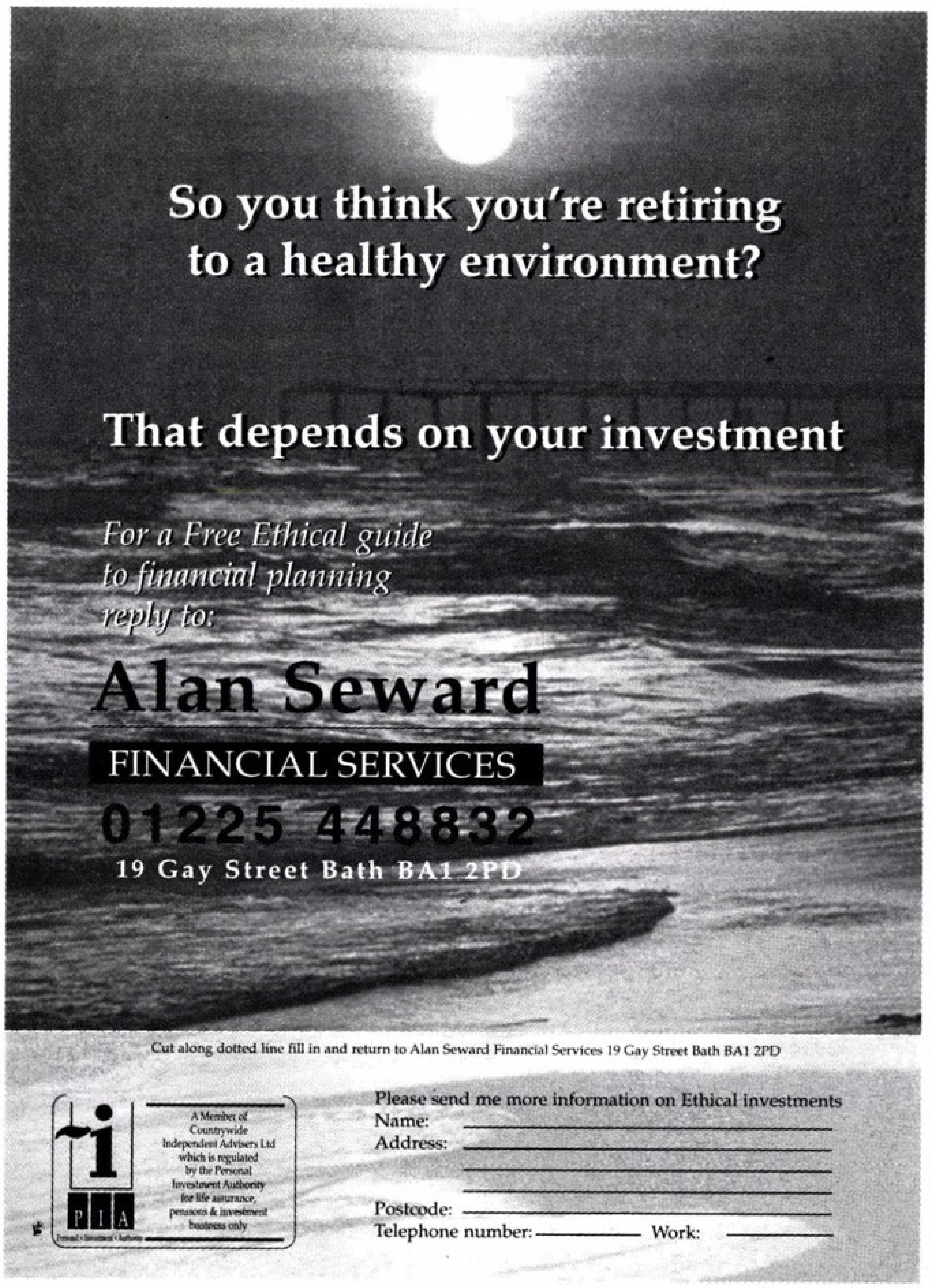
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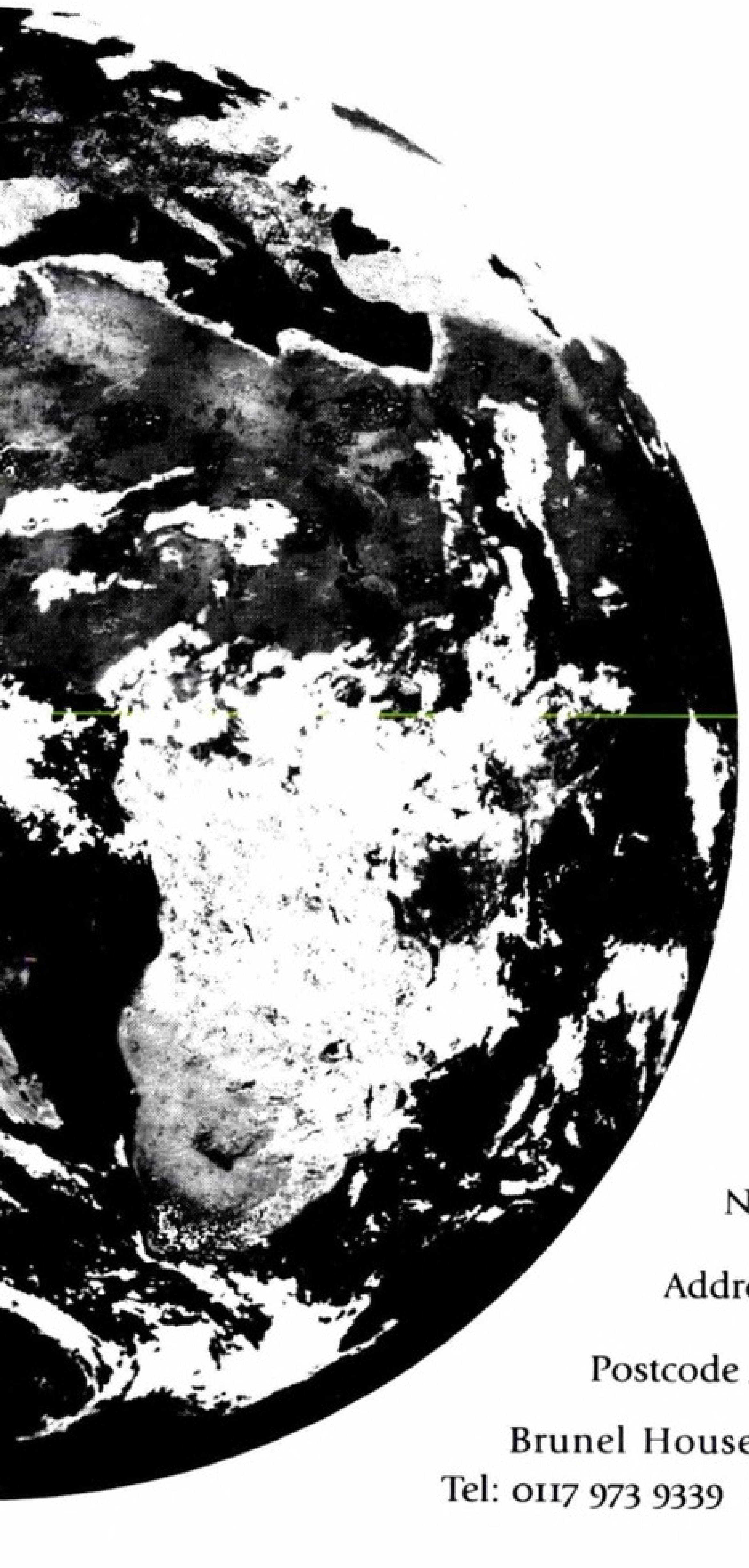

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Closing date for receipt of completed applications: Friday, 30th April, 1999.

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FRONT COVER ILLUSTRATION BY **IAN MOORE**.
MAGAZINE DESIGNED BY **ALAN HUGHES.**

THIS MONTH'S **THEME**

Poverty

FROM THIS MONTH'S **EDITOR**

We are sitting around a kitchen table that is covered in papers and magazines. Outside, the rain pours down and occasionally the sound of it drumming on the roof drowns our conversation. Fortified by endless cups of tea and coffee, we are trying to thrash out our ideas on poverty.

This could be a standard meeting of the **NI** Co-operative in Oxford. Or a session of the editorial group. But it isn't. This meeting is taking place in the middle of the forests and tea plantations of the Nilgiri hills in southern India. The rain is the north-east monsoon, turning roads into red slush and lending its damp stench to clothes, walls and bedding.

But this new place heralds a new venture – an issue of the **NI** co-edited from the Majority World. Not by one, or two, but by three of us.

Stan and Mari Marcel Thekaekara are long-time friends of the **NI**. They have worked with tribal people (*adivasis*) in the Nilgiris since 1984. Adivasis here were once considered society's dregs, its lowest and its poorest, deprived of their lands and dying unnecessary deaths. Stan and Mari were instrumental in founding an organization now run by the tribals themselves which has enabled them to get back their land, their health – and above all their self-respect.

So the discussions we were having about poverty were rooted in the everyday reality we could see if we took an umbrella and stepped outside the door, but also in the hope and the knowledge that it is possible to move out of poverty.

The ideas flew back and forth across the table, as subsequently they were to flow rather more erratically to and fro by e-mail. We wanted a magazine that didn't just describe poverty but took its arguments from the voices of people who are poor. Stan and Mari had visited Britain and argued forcefully that although poverty manifests itself differently in North and South, its impact on people is the same. You feel isolated and helpless; you are not able to control your own life. No difference here, whether you live on a housing estate in Scotland or the US, or in the forests of India, or in rural Australia.

Our conversations at the kitchen table led to new worlds, new ideas, new contacts. There is a community of people out there who are challenging the money-oriented values that lead us to divide the world and its people into 'rich' and 'poor'. They are also trying to make the fine words from international platforms about the eradication of poverty translate into their daily lives.

A positive magazine about poverty? Perhaps that is going a bit far. But one which wants us to look at poverty differently? Yes.

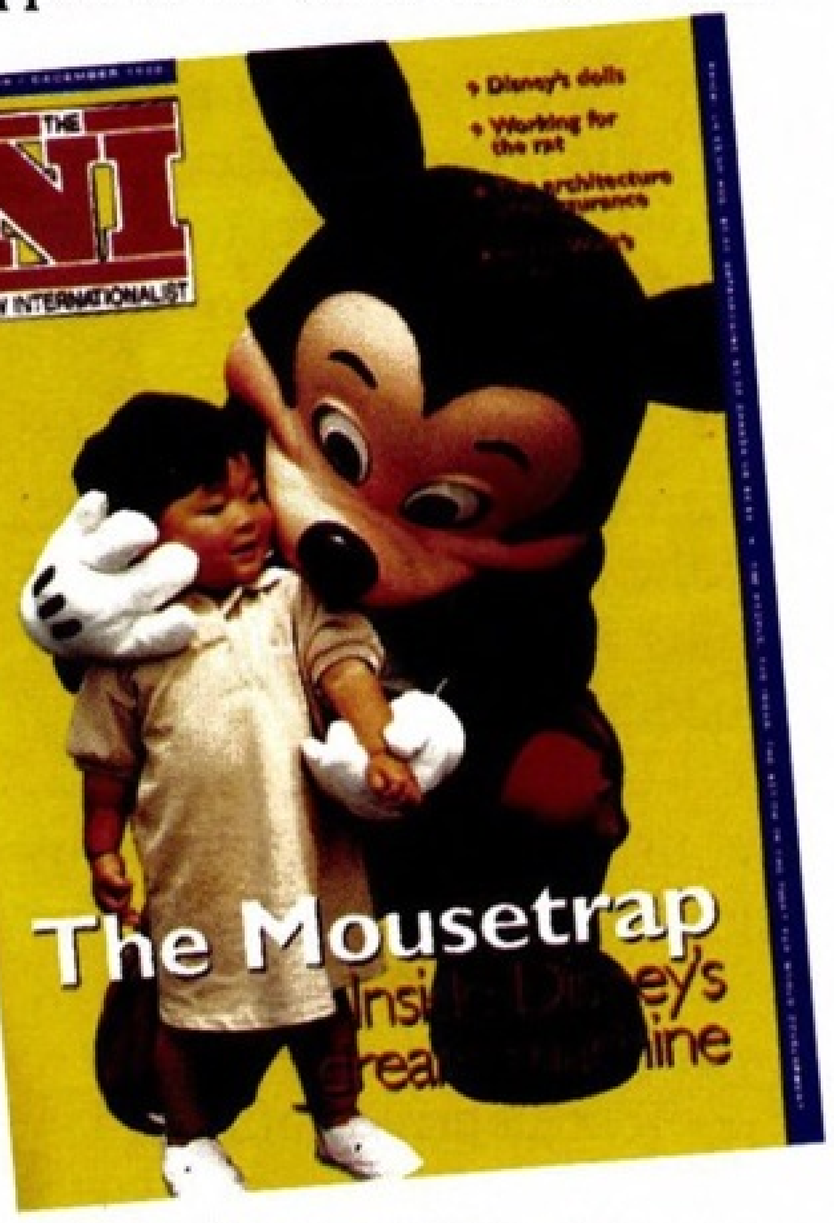
Nikki van der Gaag

Nikki van der Gaag
for the ***New Internationalist*** *Co-operative*

Letters

Reading Donald

It is surprising to find no reference in your Disney issue to the Marxist critique *Para leer el Pato Donald* (How to read Donald Duck) by Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart. This first appeared in Chile in 1971 and has since been published in several other countries and languages. The Disney corporation asked the US Government to prevent distribution of an English translation in 1976; while the request failed, it did restrict distribution in North America. An extract explains that the 'threat' of Disney 'derives not so much from their embodiment of the "American Way of Life" as that of the "American Dream of Life". It is the manner in which the US dreams and redeems itself, and then imposes that dream on others for its own salvation, which poses the danger for the dependent countries. It forces us Latin Americans to see ourselves as they see us.'



A further observation: Jeremy Seabrook in the same issue describes how the public's reaction to the death of Princess Diana 'suggests a vast reservoir of exploitable emotion'. I would give priority in this role to John Kennedy, whose death also had a worldwide impact. For example, in Bern, Switzerland, a traditional annual market was cancelled for the first time in more than 550 years as a mark of respect.

Martin Davey
Toronto, Canada

Disney's defence

The **New Internationalist** welcomes your letters. But please keep them short. They may be edited for purposes of space or clarity. Include a home telephone number if possible and send your letters to the nearest editorial office. The address and e-mail are inside the front cover.

I read with interest the edition on Disney (**NI 308**) but felt it had one glaring problem – a lack of comment from Disney. By devoting an entire magazine to a subject, *New Internationalist* has the chance to look at all sides. In this case it did not.

I have read that Disney's positive attitudes towards gay and lesbian employees led to a boycott in the American Bible Belt – surely this is an issue which shows the company in a positive light and should have been pursued.

I am not defending Disney – I am saying the company should have been allowed a defence.

Diane Parkes
Walsall, England

Human corrosion

I read with a mixture of incredulity and anathema the letter from ME Barlow (**NI 308**) on world population numbers. He/she writes about the necessity to 'reduce' the population as if it were some kind of pest whose numbers must be kept under control. Why should anyone, in the first place, stigmatize and judge those who, by having more than two or three children, are exercising a right and choice to procreate? To say that all people should follow a certain specific is to standardize the human race, and in so doing, corrode what it is to be human. I wonder whether it is accidental that Barlow's quota of two or three children is also the typical number of most Western families? Many Southern people do indeed have more children but the reasons for this are many and have nothing to do with selfishness. The only harm a large population causes is to the environment and as all **NI** readers should know, it is the minority world of the West that has caused the greatest damage to the environment with our rapacious – some might say selfish – use of its resources.

Anita Nagarajan
London, England

Reef damage

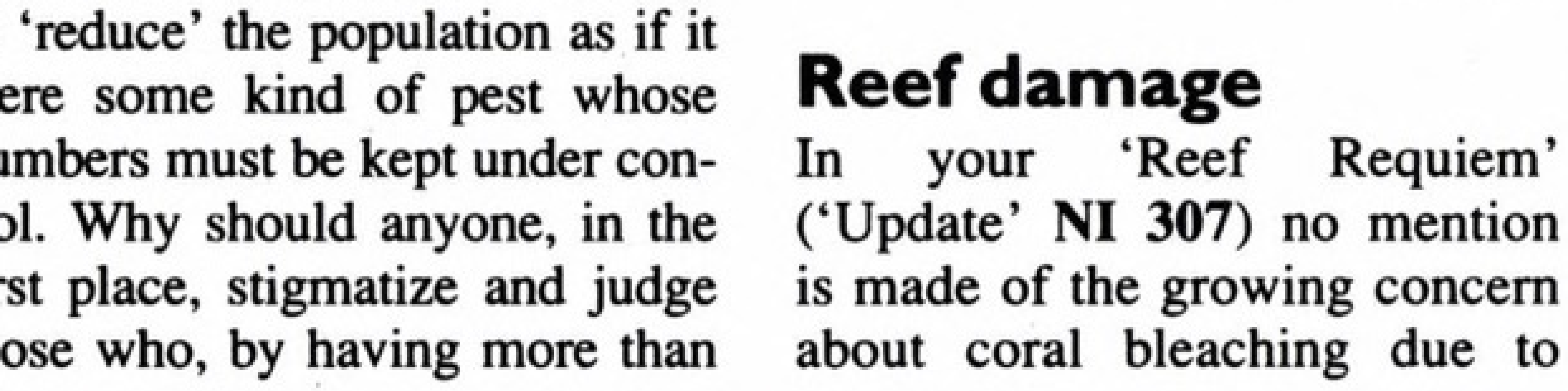
In your 'Reef Requiem' ('Update' **NI 307**) no mention is made of the growing concern about coral bleaching due to slight increases in ocean temperatures caused by global warming. So far the Great Barrier Reef has not suffered as much as other reef areas due to differences in ocean currents. We seem to produce our share (or more) of damage anyway, through agricultural and other development practices.

Joan McVilly
Rathdowney, Queensland, Australia

Real Utopia

Paul Bennett's idea about abolishing money ('Letters' **NI 308**) is obviously a good one but the implications are enormous. It would need an entirely different view of life than acquisitive capitalism breeds in us, a communal rather than an individualistic ethic. But then if it is true that the end of the profit motive would liberate vast resources for use and distribution, as Paul Bennett suggests, then perhaps even the pursuit of individual needs and ambitions would be possible. In any case, it's hard not to agree that this is a valuable idea which does deserve more space, especially in a magazine like the **NI** which surely believes that today's Utopia can be tomorrow's reality. Who knows? Perhaps this is the next stage in human social evolution.

Howard Moss
Swansea, Wales


Give up the profit motive and we'll all get more
LET'S GO FOR IT!
I think someone just missed the plot.
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VIV QUILLIN

Celebrating old ladies

In her letter (**NI 307**) referring to the 'Letter from Mongolia' (**NI 304**), Margo Whitehead insinuates that the essay suffered from ageism and sexism and that the author was guilty of some sort of egomaniacal assumption that the foreigner is always something of interest.

Ms Waugh likely knew that these women were talking about her because she speaks and understands the language. Moreover, in many countries in the South, the indigenous term for 'old ladies' marks them out as women to be listened to and respected by the communities in which they live.

I might also add that in many East Asian languages (Lao, Thai, Chinese, Vietnamese and certainly Khmer among them), second-, third- and often first-personal pronouns are based entirely on age and sex as they relate to the speaker: Grandmother, Uncle, Younger Sister are just some of the family relationships that are conferred on friends. In Khmer 'old lady' is simply how one directly addresses elderly women, a word synonymous with Grandmother.

Surely the fact that Ms Waugh has chosen not to exclude the writer from this linguistic and cultural reality in a publication like the **NI** is to be celebrated rather than denigrated.

Kiri Schultz
Siem Reap, Cambodia

Forced crisis

I was pleased to see that your issue on money (**NI 306**) questioned the common orthodoxy that the East Asian crisis was brought on by corruption and inefficiency in the states involved.

Economic liberalization forced on the countries by international bodies such as the OECD

(Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the WTO (World Trade Organisation), which created a build-up of short-term debt, was much more significant in the precipitation of the crisis.

Jon Davis
York, England

Offended

As a teenager, I wait with anticipation to receive your magazine in the post every month. But as a migrant from both India and England I was a bit offended by a statement in your issue on ***Migration*** (**NI 305**), which read 'people were surprised by Hanson's popularity, given that 40 per cent of Australians are migrants or children of migrants.'

I consider myself to be an Australian, but I think the problem with many Australians is that they don't realise that we are a country of immigrants. The British, who came in 1788, and all who have come since are migrants or their children. It is the Aboriginals who were here first.

Also, to update readers, Hanson's party polled third in the Federal Election and failed to win a seat in the House of Representatives, and only won one on the Senate.

Joanna Mascarenhaus
West Pennant Hills, Australia

Thumbs down

Your issue on cocoa (**NI 304**) was outstanding in the material it covered, and showed the humanity behind the cocoa bean.

However, on page ten you use the expression 'rule of thumb'. I would request that you no longer use this term as it is what remains of an old English law that allowed a man to beat his wife with any stick that did not exceed the width of his thumb.

Pummy Kaur
Ocean Park, BC, Canada

ERRATUM
Due to an error at the photographic reproduction house, the article on Iraq that appeared on page 42 of the *1998 Chronicle of Events* (NI 309 *The Radical Twentieth Century*) was an earlier version that did not take account of the bombing of Iraq in December.

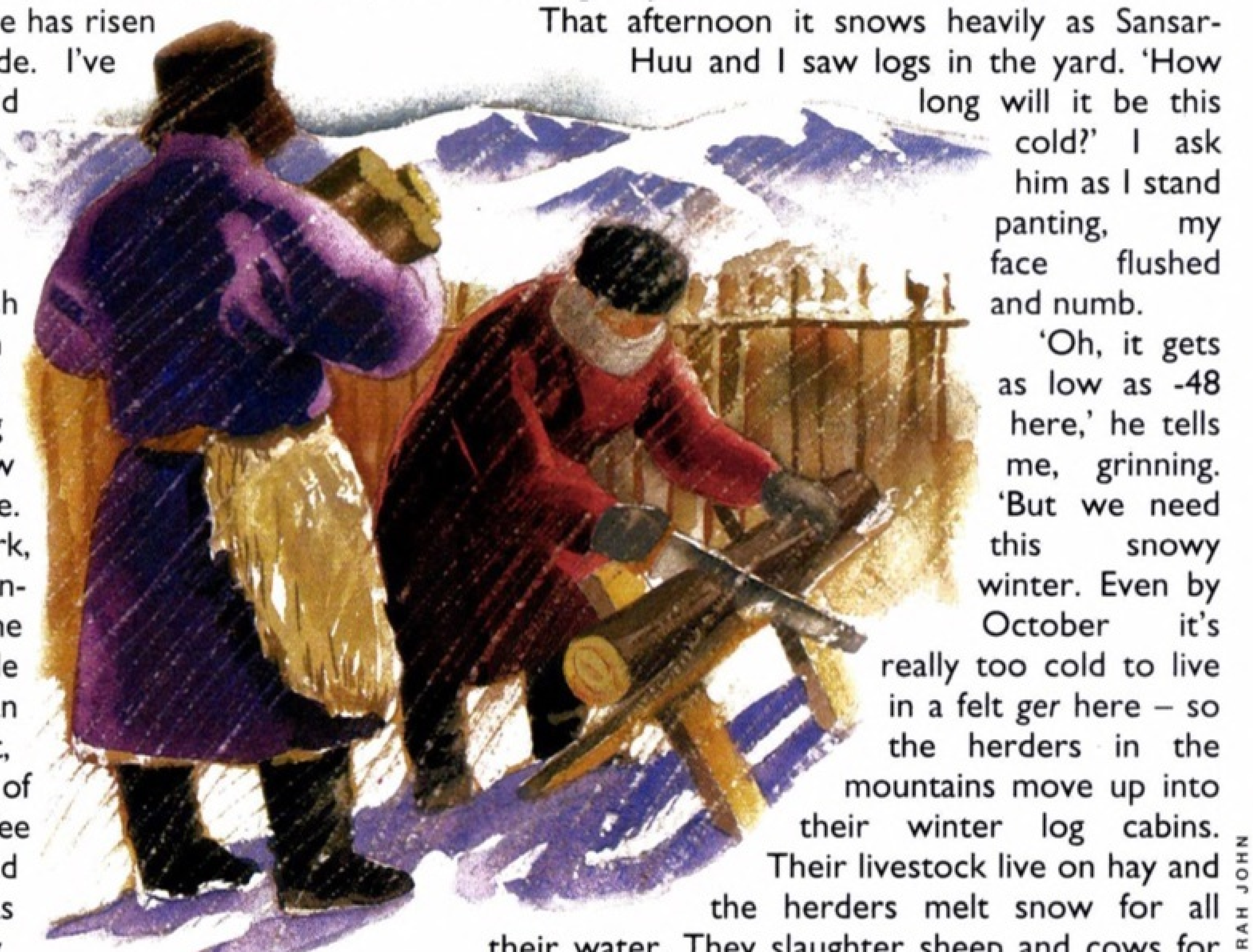
Letter from Mongolia

A frozen world

Louisa Waugh experiences Mongolia's winter.

I WAKE up and my world has frozen. Everything, and I mean everything – my water, tomato paste, soap – is encased in thick, milky ice. I light a candle, stand up in my sleeping bag and pull on another layer of clothing. Shivering, I take a knife to the water bucket and hack at the ice until bubbles rise to the surface. Lighting my small stove is tough because the wood, which was damp, is now frozen.

By the time my smoky fire is finally crackling and heating the water and ice in the kettle, the outside temperature has risen to -25° Centigrade. I've never been so cold in my life. I know the mountains surrounding my village will be drenched in fresh snow and the sun rising late, but I can't see anything because my window is coated in thick ice.



On this dark, freezing winter morning, venturing to the communal outside toilet is quite an endurance test. But, after two cups of steaming black coffee I am bundled up and off to work, just as the sky is gradually brightening.

My school is a ten-minute walk alongside the Hovd river which flows through the village. The river is now so solid that horses are being ridden and cars driven over it. Everything but my eyes is concealed from the freezing air – my gloved fingers pushed down into my pockets.

'Louisa – off to work?' calls my neighbour Sansar-Huu. 'Don't worry,' he teases me, 'it's quite warm today – just wait till it gets really cold!'

Our school has no electricity or running water, but each small classroom is heated by a wood-burning stove. This morning we all wear our coats during lessons. Wind-burnt children from herders' settlements outside the village board at the school 12 to a dormitory. Their parents pay the fees in meat and wood.

At break we jostle to be near the staff-room stove and my colleagues pull their fur hats back on. 'You sit by the fire, Louisa – you must be freezing,' offers Sansar-Huu's wife Gansukh, my fellow English teacher. I am.

After our classes Gansukh and I cross the street to the post office, which is crowded as the weekly post has just arrived. Beaming and clutching two letters I walk home with Gansukh and a couple of our students, passing herders trading camel, sheep, goat and wolf skins. We stop en route for bowls of tea at a friend's house.

At home, I need more water. Armed with a bucket I lift the creaking lid of the well opposite our yard. But the water is so frozen I can hear the rocks I fling down the shaft ricochet off the ice. Taking the axe I set out for the nearby river to forge my own well.

That afternoon it snows heavily as Sansar-Huu and I saw logs in the yard. 'How long will it be this cold?' I ask him as I stand panting, my face flushed and numb.

'Oh, it gets as low as -48 here,' he tells me, grinning. 'But we need this snowy winter. Even by October it's really too cold to live in a felt *ger* here – so the herders in the mountains move up into their winter log cabins. Their livestock live on hay and the herders melt snow for all their water. They slaughter sheep and cows for food at the start of winter, when the animals are still fat, and the ice stores the meat till the end of spring.'

'So, if the snow comes late, like it did this year, what then?' I query, resting on a white log.

'That's when the steppe gets overgrazed, which means spring will be very tough. Remember those trucks loaded up with ice driving way into the mountains?' I nod.

'The ice was for herders who didn't have enough snow and weren't near the rivers.'

Sansar-Huu pauses to wave and call greetings to a local who trots past, his horse crusted in frozen sweat. I look around me at the snowscape – silent mountains on all four sides, pack camels weighed down with flour and hay, children skating on the river – and the deep, untrodden snow.

I pick up the axe and raise it to my shoulder just as Sansar-Huu turns back to me. 'You know,' he says, 'the herders are fine now – the snow is here for the winter. Oh, we'll be waiting for spring and warmer weather to arrive – but hopefully not too soon.' ■

Louisa Waugh lives and works in Mongolia and is writing a book about Mongolian life.

Update

AUSTRALIA

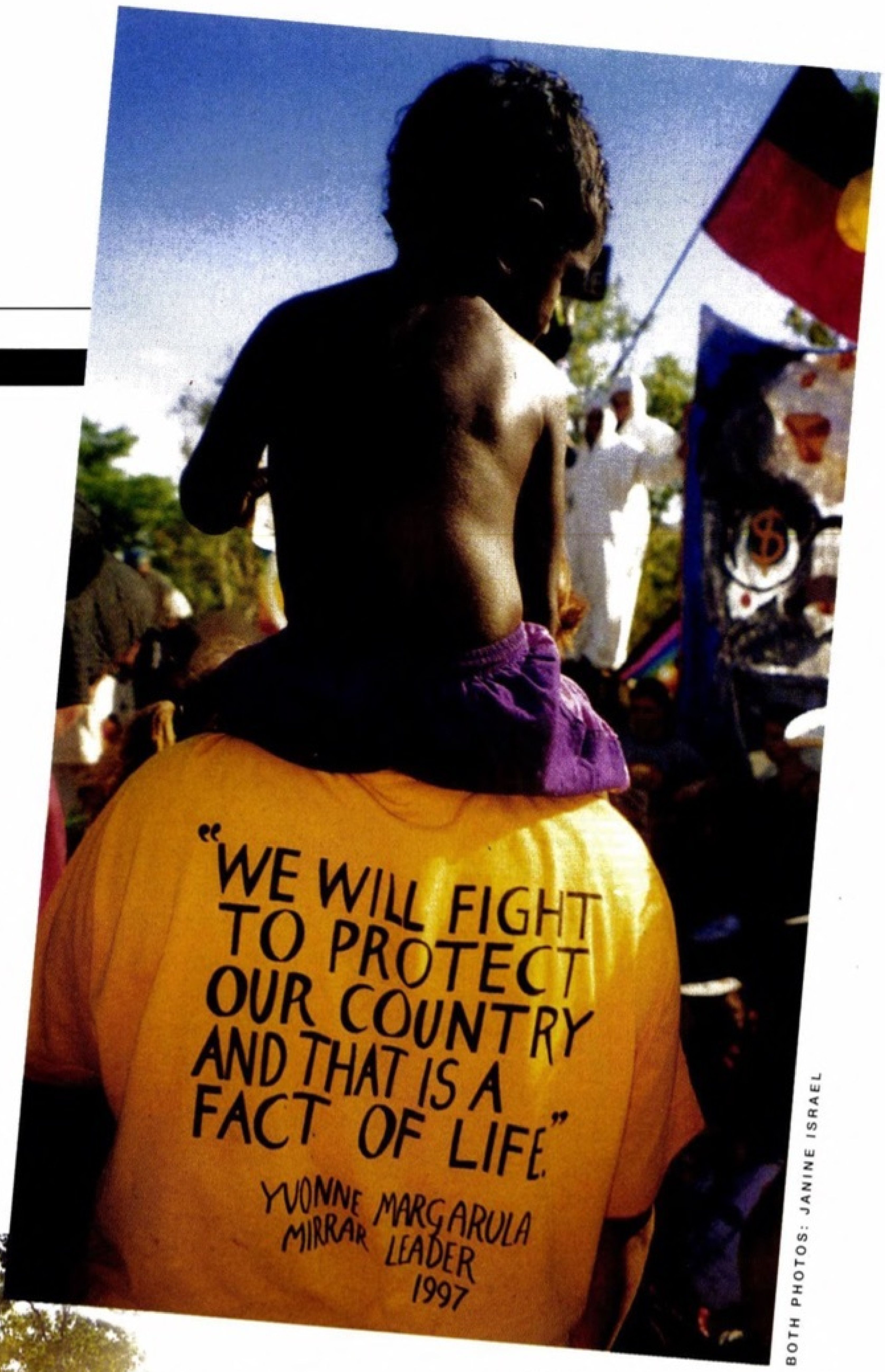
Leave it alone

Outrage over one-way uranium exports

Australia has rejected a UN recommendation that uranium mining be ceased on indigenous land. The Jabiluka uranium mine is being constructed on the sacred land of the Aboriginal Mirrar people in the heart of Kakadu National Park. The World Heritage list of UNESCO placed Kakadu as one of the few sites of value for both its natural and its cultural heritage and stated they would be threatened by mining.

The conservative Liberal Government, led by Prime Minister John Howard, has branded the findings of the international delegation 'biased'. The Government, which has plans for 23 more uranium mines, has continually ignored national opinion polls showing over two-thirds of Australians are opposed to the mine.

The campaign against Jabiluka has gained unprecedented momentum, becoming the biggest land-rights and environmental battle Australia has faced, with thousands of protesters regularly taking to the streets to express their opposition. 'Land rights, not mining rights' and 'Export Howard, not uranium' are the mantras chanted across the country in peaceful, colourful weekly rallies.


"WE WILL FIGHT TO PROTECT OUR COUNTRY AND THAT IS A FACT OF LIFE"
YVONNE MARGARULA MIRRAR LEADER 1997

BOTH PHOTOS: JANINE ISRAEL

A blockade situated next to the Jabiluka mine site has been running since March 1998. Over 2,500 people, including many concerned international backpackers, have visited the blockade camp, and 527 blockaders have been arrested, mostly for trespassing. Many face jail terms under the Northern Territory's new 'zero tolerance' mandatory sentencing laws.

Yvonne Margarula, the senior traditional landowner of the Mirrar people, says: 'We live with the environmental damage and negative social impact from mining development.' Her people have been fighting uranium mining on their land for over 20 years.

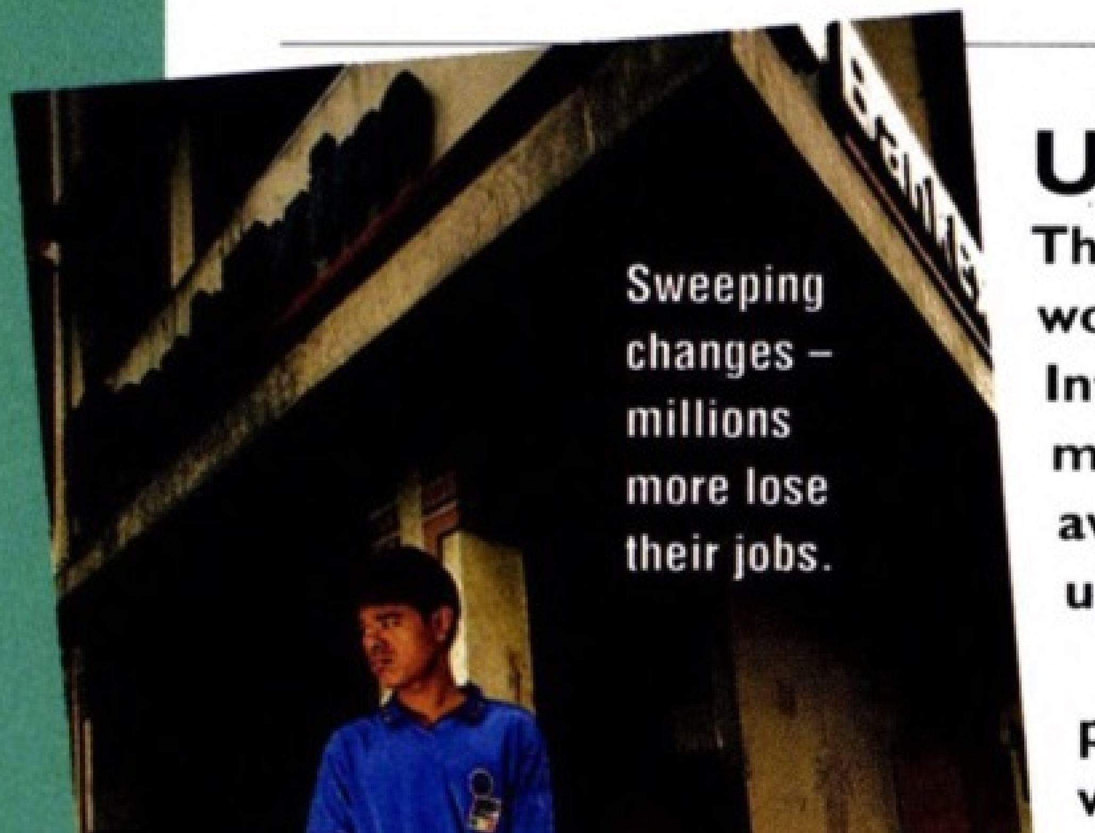
Environmental assessments of the neighbouring Ranger uranium mine have revealed over 100 breaches of Ranger's 'Environmental Requirements' (the rules laid down to protect the national park from the impact of mining) in the last two decades.

URANIUM MINING
NOT IN KAKADU
NOT ANYWHERE
URANIUM
LEAVE IT IN
THE GROUND
BETTER ACTIVE
TODAY THAN

Meanwhile, the Australian Government has refused a request from one of President Clinton's top advisors and the American company Pangea to use central Australia as a dumping ground for nuclear waste. Green groups argue that as one of the world's prime uranium exporters, Australia should consider the ramifications of its increasing exports, including the moral obligations concerning disposal of radioactive waste. ■

Janine Israel

For more information: http://www.jabiluka.net



Sweeping changes – millions more lose their jobs.

CHRIS STOWERS / PANOS PICTURES

Unemployment peaks

The number of unemployed and underemployed people worldwide is at the highest level ever, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO). Some 150 million workers are actually unemployed, seeking or available for work – 10 million have become unemployed in 1998 alone due to the financial crisis.

Some 750-900 million people in the world, or 25-30 per cent of the population, are underemployed – working substantially less than full-time, though wanting full-time employment. Some 60 million people, 15-24 years old, are actively seeking employment.

In Asia the picture is particularly grim. Indonesia, for example, has seen steep increases in unemployment and underemployment, accompanied by food shortages. One in every five Indonesian employees lost their jobs in 1998 and unemployment is around 15 per cent.

Chakravarthi Raghavan/Third World Network Features

Costly sentences

Britain jails a higher proportion of its population than any other country in the European Union. One in six prisoners has defaulted on fines.

The number of women in prison has doubled in the past few years despite the fact that the vast majority are serving sentences for giving false information to social security, shoplifting and other types of non-violent crime.

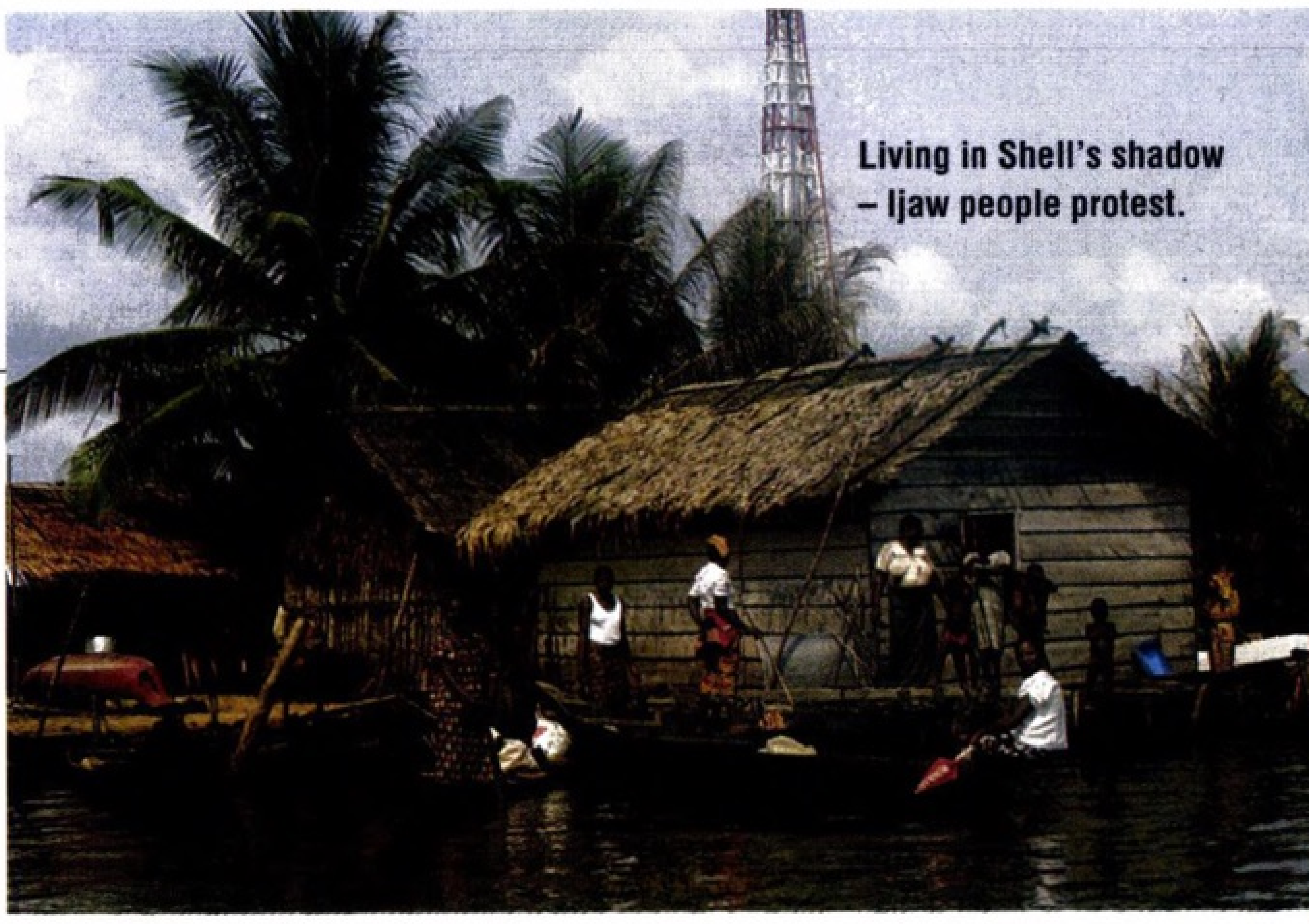
A study conducted by the Kent Probation Service suggested offenders under supervised probation were 22-per-cent less likely to be convicted of a further offence within five years than those who were sent to prison. It costs the taxpayer $38,400 a year to keep an offender in prison whereas the Kent practice is estimated to be much less costly.

The Economist Vol 347 No 8067

NIGERIA

Deadly collusion

More blood is spilled over oil



Living in Shell's shadow – Ijaw people protest.

SARA LEIGH LEWIS / PANOS PICTURES

CLASHES between soldiers and local protesters continue in Nigeria where hundreds of Ijaw people were killed during one week during a bloody backlash against non-violent civil disobedience. The killing started when soldiers opened fire in Yenagoa, capital of Nigeria's main oil-producing Bayelsa State, on 30 December. Youths had gathered there to protest the expiry of an ultimatum to oil firms to leave the region. Some unconfirmed reports from Nigeria allege that the military used Shell helicopters to bomb Ijaw towns.

The demonstrators planned to stage a series of non-violent occupations and protests against gas flares, pipelines and other oil installations. They are demanding the withdrawal of the operating companies.

'Operation ClimateChange', as the youths dubbed it, has been amazingly effective at demonstrating that these local communities need to be taken seriously – 40 per cent of production in the region was shut down by activists. Almost two-thirds of Nigerian oil flows from Ijaw territory.

But the Nigerian military authorities declared a state of emergency on 30 December and created a 'Naval Special Security Task Force' to police the Delta to 'protect oil installations against vandalization'. Tanks, warships and hundreds of troops have been sent into Beyelsa State. Soldiers have scoured villages, searched cars, and arbitrarily imprisoned and tortured individuals in search of the organizers of the protests. Although the state of emergency has technically been lifted, the Task Force remains operational.

'This is a serious backward step for Nigeria. These killings in Bayelsa State raise concerns that the current Government is returning to the repressive methods used by the Abacha regime,' says Peter Takirambudde, speaking for Human Rights Watch which has condemned the killings.

Oronto Douglas, a spokesperson for the Ijaw Youth Council explained: 'All we want is dialogue. What they want is force. We are asking the multinational companies to withdraw from Ijaw areas immediately.' ■

***Drillbits and Tailings* Vol 4 No 1**

For more information subscribe to shell-nigeria-action by sending an e-mail to: listproc@essential.org Write: subscribe shell-nigeria-action.

Lighting up

The IMF has come under fire for helping open markets in South Korea and Thailand to global tobacco corporations. Both countries are a rich market for US-based tobacco giants – South Korea smokes more than 100 billion cigarettes and Thais smoke 50 billion cigarettes a year. Now their state-owned companies must be privatized due to the IMF's requirements for emergency loans.

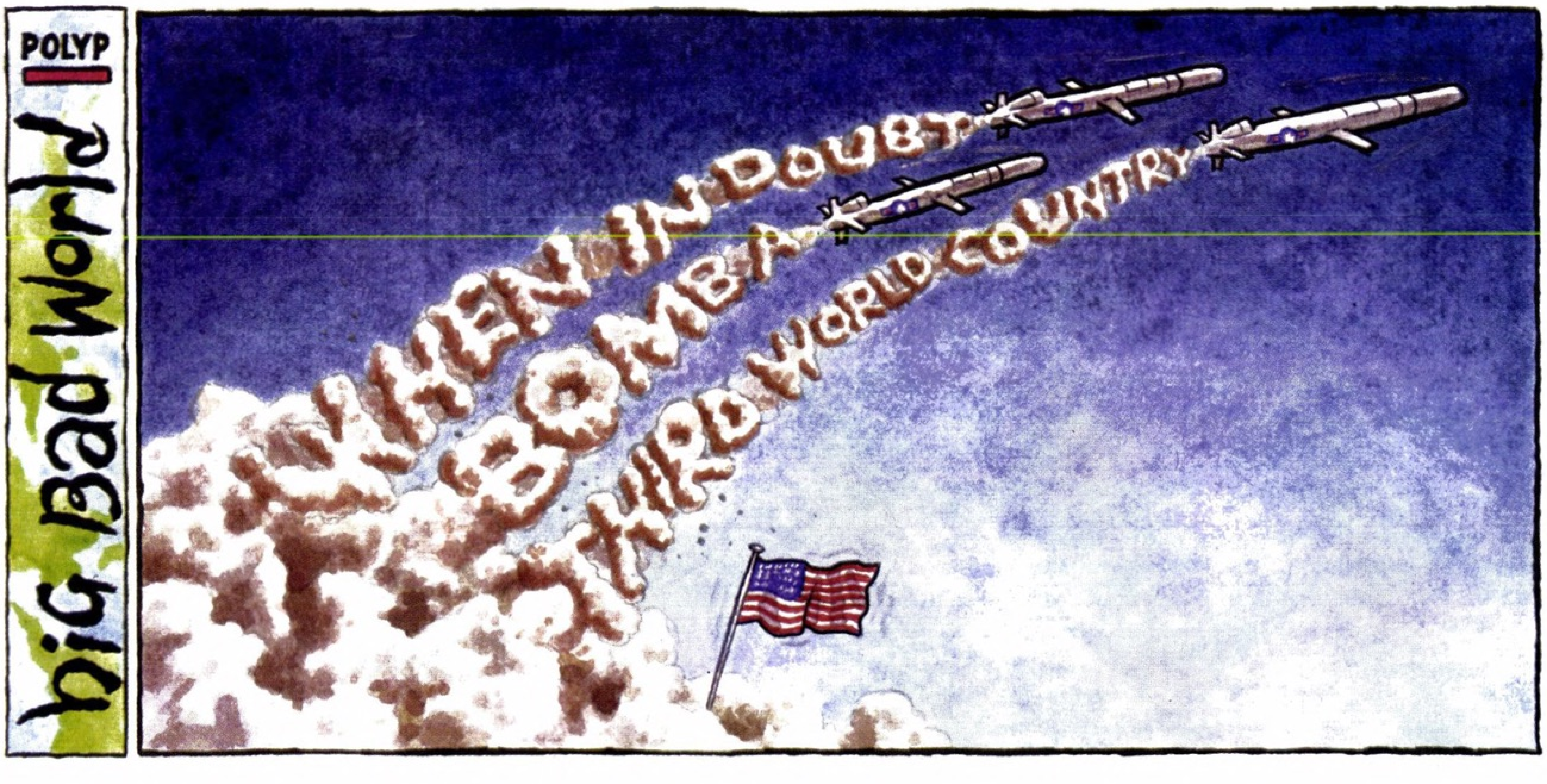
Anti-smoking campaigners say the ambitious tobacco giants will increase the number of smokers in Thailand and South Korea. They point to Turkey, which has become one of the fastest-growing cigarette markets in the world since the Government scrapped price controls that had propped up the state-run tobacco monopoly.

Tobacco companies march into South Korea.

CHRIS STOWERS / PANOS PICTURES

The impact of privatization may be greatest in Thailand – which has some of the strictest anti-smoking legislation in the world including a complete tobacco-advertising ban and a requirement that all cigarette packs include a warning that smoking can cause impotence.

Wall Street Journal 16 December 1998



Update

AFRICA

Chilly reception

Mixed feelings about Europe's roaming fridges

African countries that have agreed to reduce the use of CFC-emitting refrigerators have also become the dumping ground for phased-out fridges from Europe. Developing countries have until the year 2010 to stop the use of CFCs, according to the internationally-agreed Montreal Protocol. In Zambia, a lax import-control regime has worsened the situation. Some local companies – in collusion with European firms – are cashing in on a demand for cheap refrigerators by dumping models that have been phased out in Europe.

In Zambia CFC-emitting refrigerators are around half the price of new non-CFC ones and are sold under an attractive scheme so that payments can be made in instalments over six months. For the average Zambian consumer the refrigerators are just too good a bargain to pass by.

Too good to refuse: CFC-emitting fridges sell fast.

RON GILING / STILL PICTURES

'This is just one small fridge, surely it can't be compared to those big factories which smoke heavily. I doubt if it can really have much impact at all,' remarked Jones Mwale, a low-income civil servant who was negotiating payment terms in a refrigerator shop.

And a freezer has helped fishmonger Muleya Hachilala expand her business: 'Whatever this CFC means, all I know is that the deep freezer has been a big asset for me.'

While the Zambia Association of Chambers of Commerce and the industry are tight-lipped on the issue, dealers insist they are serving the public. They claim that with an increasing number of Zambians unable to afford such items, they provide a valuable service.

'Although inadequate legislation has hampered our efforts in checking the dumping of such refrigerators, we are now determined to take it head on,' Environmental Council of Zambia spokesperson Sadreck Nsongela said. According to Nsongela, CFC-refrigerators will not be allowed into Zambia after the year 2001.

Some 64 million domestic refrigerators are manufactured worldwide annually and the sector is growing at the rate of 15 per cent in countries like China, India and Indonesia, according to Greenpeace. Campaigners say developing countries will save money by switching to non-CFC-technologies that are now freely available from industrialized countries. Greenpeace Germany, which has developed one such technology – the Greenfreeze – has offered it for free to developing countries. ■

Vincent Zulu/Third World Network Features

T-shirt terror

Two years after his death, rap star Tupac Shakur lives on in Sierra Leone's civil war. In September more than 100 of the Revolutionary United Front rebels raided the northern town of Kukuna wearing a new uniform – T-shirts bearing Tupac's picture. Regular uniforms are too expensive for the rebels, while the T-shirt is available in major cities of the country and sells for $3. A Sierra Leonean military official says: 'Dressing in Tupac's T-shirt perhaps reinforces the rebels' love for violence because Tupac is not a good role model.' This is not the first time that music icons have played a part in the conflict. In the early days of the war, rebels wore T-shirts with a picture of the late Bob Marley and many people just wearing his image were detained or lynched. Now to wear a Tupac T-shirt in Kukuna risks interrogation or punishment.

World Press Review Vol 45 No 2

Rich pickings

The humanitarian organization Doctors Without Borders (DWB) has cancelled operations in North Korea saying food and medical aid are reserved for the military and party officials. 'We are certain that the food and medical aid is being allocated according to political connections,' says Eric Goemaere, general director of DWB. These statements have been questioned by the United Nations operation in North Korea. A spokesperson for UNICEF says: 'We have no evidence whatsoever that any aid has been diverted.'

Military are first in line for foreign aid.

JEREMY HOMER / PANOS PICTURES

Meanwhile, refugees arriving in China report that thousands of orphans wander in search of food, corpses are dragged off and disposed of by the authorities and there are widespread epidemics of diarrhoea. These refugees also claim that the political and military élite gets more than 70 per cent of the food.

World Press Review Vol 46 No 1

Take the bombs too

The US is to withdraw from Panama towards the end of this year – but many Panamanians are most concerned about what they leave behind. They want the US to clean up a century's worth of unexploded bombs and chemical pollution. One Santiago paper claims more than 21 people have been killed by US bombs since 1979 and residues from tests of herbicides and biological weapons may have contaminated areas. US Colonel David Hunt says the US does not have the technology to conduct a full cleanup. He also says the bombs are too old to be dangerous, with some dating from World War Two and earlier. But Rick Stauber, former US military consultant, says: 'The idea of a limited life for these munitions is false. They are just as dangerous now as they were 50 or 60 years ago.'

World Press Review Vol 46 No 2

Quote

'Gnomes have no place in the gardens of the vulgar *petit-bourgeoisie* where they are being made ridiculous.'

Spokesperson for the gnome-snatching
Garden Gnomes Liberation Front

Reach for the sky – like many poor communities, the people of Easterhouse estate, Glasgow, want a decent life.

HARRY GRUYAERT / MAGNUM

Poverty: challenging the myths

Being poor is about not having enough money. Or is it?

Nikki van der Gaag

investigates.

THE people of Devonport are surrounded by a wall. Three metres high and six kilometres long, it serves to separate them from the military complex on their doorstep. But it has another, less obvious function. It marks out the boundaries of an estate known for its deprivation. Devonport, a suburb of Plymouth in south-west England, is labelled as an area with a high poverty rate, where crime, vandalism and drug-dealing abound.

My own reception in Devonport is warm and welcoming. I am picked up from the train station and driven to an apartment block overlooking the

WE ARE ALL HUMAN BEINGS
WITH US NOT FOR US
RESPECT

PHOTOS OF BANNERS BY: PERRICK PENET

Banning poverty – produced by people in poverty as part of a campaign by ATD Fourth World.

wall. Karen and her son Chris give me a slap-up meal before taking me downstairs to meet 79-year-old Alice, who regales me with tales of being a submarine fitter during the War and puts me to bed with a cup of tea and an electric blanket. From the spare-room window I can see a yard, grim and dripping in the rain, but inside I am full, snug and warm.

This feeling stays with me for the whole of the next day as I attend a workshop that Devonport Action Against Poverty (DAP) is holding in the local community centre which has been refitted and decorated by local people.

Poverty, say the DAP members firmly: 'is not about money, though it is about what you can do with money'. People should be respected not for what they have but for who they are. 'We call ourselves "people experiencing poverty", or "grassroots people" rather than poor people. We are people first. People who just happen to be poor,' says Karen. 'But we are rich in lots of other ways.'

Generosity, for one. I am not used to being housed and fed by complete strangers, let alone those who can little afford it.

Of course money is an issue, but so too are good housing, jobs, healthcare, education, leisure facilities, improved levels of benefit which don't penalize people for working, better transport, and an improved environment. Then there are the things money can't always buy: more time, good relationships, privacy ('Poor people don't have the luxury of privacy; their affairs are everyone's business,' says Karen), community spirit and, importantly, respect.

The need for respect comes high on the list of all those experiencing poverty. Moraene Roberts, another 'grassroots person' and a member of the UK Coalition Against Poverty, puts it plainly: 'The very poor tell us over and over again that a human being's greatest misfortune is not hunger or being unable to read, nor even being without work. The greatest misfortune of all is to know that you count for nothing, to the point where even your suffering is ignored. The worst blow of all is the contempt of your fellow-citizens.'[1]

Such intangible things are hard to measure or even define. Poverty itself is discussed, defined and measured in an infinite number of ways. The United Nations Development Programme talks about 'human poverty': 'a denial of choices and opportunities for living a tolerable life'; the World Bank of 'income poverty' – 'living on less than a dollar a day'. Then there is 'absolute' poverty – those below a defined poverty line or threshold – and 'relative' poverty – poor in relation to those around you. Recently, governments have begun to use the term 'social exclusion' as a useful tool for describing what poor people experience. This is fine, as long as it is not an excuse for failing to spend money. And it begs a number of questions: If some people, areas, or communities are 'socially excluded' what are they excluded from? Who then are the 'included'? Is this simply a way of avoiding the word 'poor'? (A word which people overseas have no problem claiming but which people in the West often reject because it comes with such stigma attached). What Devonport and other places of 'social exclusion' least need is yet another label.

The interesting thing about all these definitions is that they only define the poor. No-one thinks of finding labels for the rich – there are far more words for poverty than there are for wealth, as the dictionary on Page 13 clearly shows. It is the poor who are the 'problem' – a belief hotly contested by 'the poor' themselves. The other problem is gender; social exclusion doesn't value economic roles and relationships at the household and community level, which are mainly performed by women. Yet women all over the world bear the brunt of poverty, partly because of the extra burden of responsibilities they have for the household and partly because they lack access to land, credit and employment.[2]

HUMAIRA HAIDER

Tea and sympathy: Alice from Devonport (above). More but not too much: demonstration in Patna, India, (next page).

Labels and measurements are useful tools for dealing with poverty; but sometimes they can detract from what being poor really means, like having to spend all your time worrying about where the next meal is coming from. It means hunger, isolation and disempowerment. And waste, not just for those experiencing it, but for everyone. In the words of Joseph Wreskinski, founder of ATD Fourth

Money matters

Cash may be less important than respect but it dominates your life when you don't have enough. Erica lives on the Easterhouse estate in Glasgow, Scotland with her husband Ivor and children Charlotte, Deirdre, Gilbert and Mary. She keeps a diary.

MONDAY

I get up and get the kids dressed for school and give them some tea and toast. Charlotte goes to the Post Office to collect the child benefit. I give Deirdre £2.80 for two days' bus fares to school and back. Go to shop and spend money like this:

0.69	potatoes
0.69	loaf of bread
5.00	gas token
5.03	cigarettes
0.60	two tins beans
0.22	soap
0.49	washing-up liquid

When they come home from school, Gilbert and Mary need money for school Christmas trips but I don't have it to give to them. I can't even start thinking about Christmas presents for the kids. I am still in debt paying for last Christmas. I am still paying for the kids' clothes. Sometimes you have to borrow to eat. Once I borrowed from a man and put down my child benefit book. I worked out he took £450 to lend me £220. It was robbery but I had no other option. We watch some TV and then we all go to bed.

TUESDAY

Get the kids up and to school. Spend money on:

0.69	potatoes
0.60	two tins beans
0.69	bread
5.03	cigarettes
0.73	sugar
1.98	soap powder
1.77	two packets of toilet towels
0.67	packet of toilet rolls
1.40	bus fare for Deidre tomorrow.

I am left with £1.00. I get a letter from the Water Board. They say they are going to cut me off. I keep the £1.00 for the kids so they can get some sweets from the shops. It is not much but it will keep them happy for a little while. Make the tea, watch TV, then we all go to bed early.

WEDNESDAY

Get up with the kids. Make them tea and toast and get them off to school. Peace at last. Charlotte goes to the Post Office to get our social money, £74.49. Spend money on

10.00	gas token
10.00	electric token
5.00	water token
5.18	milk
0.69	bread
0.69	potatoes
0.49	margarine
1.96	two packets of meat pies
0.60	two tins beans
1.40	Deirdre's bus ticket

I have spent £40.96 and have £33.53 left. Gilbert is off school at the moment because he needs new shoes and that is £10.00. I can't afford them just now so I will have to wait and see what I can do for him. I'll go to the second-hand shop as soon as I can.

The kids come home from school. Thank God they get a meal at school. Ivor is making tea while I get the kids ready for bed. Deirdre and Charlotte are going out with some friends. So me and Ivor are on our own at last for the first time in ages. The kids come back and we all go to bed.

SATURDAY

Get up as usual but my head hurts bad. The kids are running about mad so I have to shout at them so they are not pleased with me at all. Make them some toast. I have to send for bread plus some cigs. Must have my cigs or I can't get through the day. I hate it that people say that because you are on social security you shouldn't smoke. But it's like Valium, it calms me. I wish I could give it up. I've tried and failed.

0.69	bread
2.93	cigs
5.00	electric token.

I have £5.75 left. I have asked the kids to help clean up for me. They moaned but they did it. We all sit and watch TV. The TV set is on its last legs and I don't know what I'd do without it.

The kids ask for some bread. I can only give them one slice each because it is all that is left. Ivor has not got up today. Kids and I have a game of cards and I win. The kids go to bed. I want to go for a bath but I have to keep the hot water for Sunday for the kids.

This is an taken from *Faith in the Poor* by Bob Holman with Carol, Bill, Erica, Anita, Denise, Penny and Cynthia, published in 1998 by Lion Publishing and reproduced by permission.

World, an organization set up to combat poverty: 'Behind the silence of our records and our statistics lie children mutilated in their heart and spirit, young people condemned to despair, adults driven to doubt their very humanity.'[3] Poverty is relentless; it grinds you down and leaves you deprived of hope, of opportunity, of confidence in yourself.

At first glance, the statistics give cause for optimism. In the last 50 years poverty has fallen more than in the previous 500. Over the century some three to four billion of the world's people will have experienced substantial improvements in their quality of life. Since 1960, child death-rates in developing countries have been halved and malnutrition has declined by more than a third.[4]

However, such figures hide the fact that the absolute number of poor people is increasing as the world's population rises. The number of people with incomes of less than a dollar a day rose by almost 100 million between 1987 and 1993. By next year more than half the people in sub-Saharan Africa will not have enough to live on, and the global economic crisis means that over one billion people will suffer a fall in their already-meagre living standards.[4]

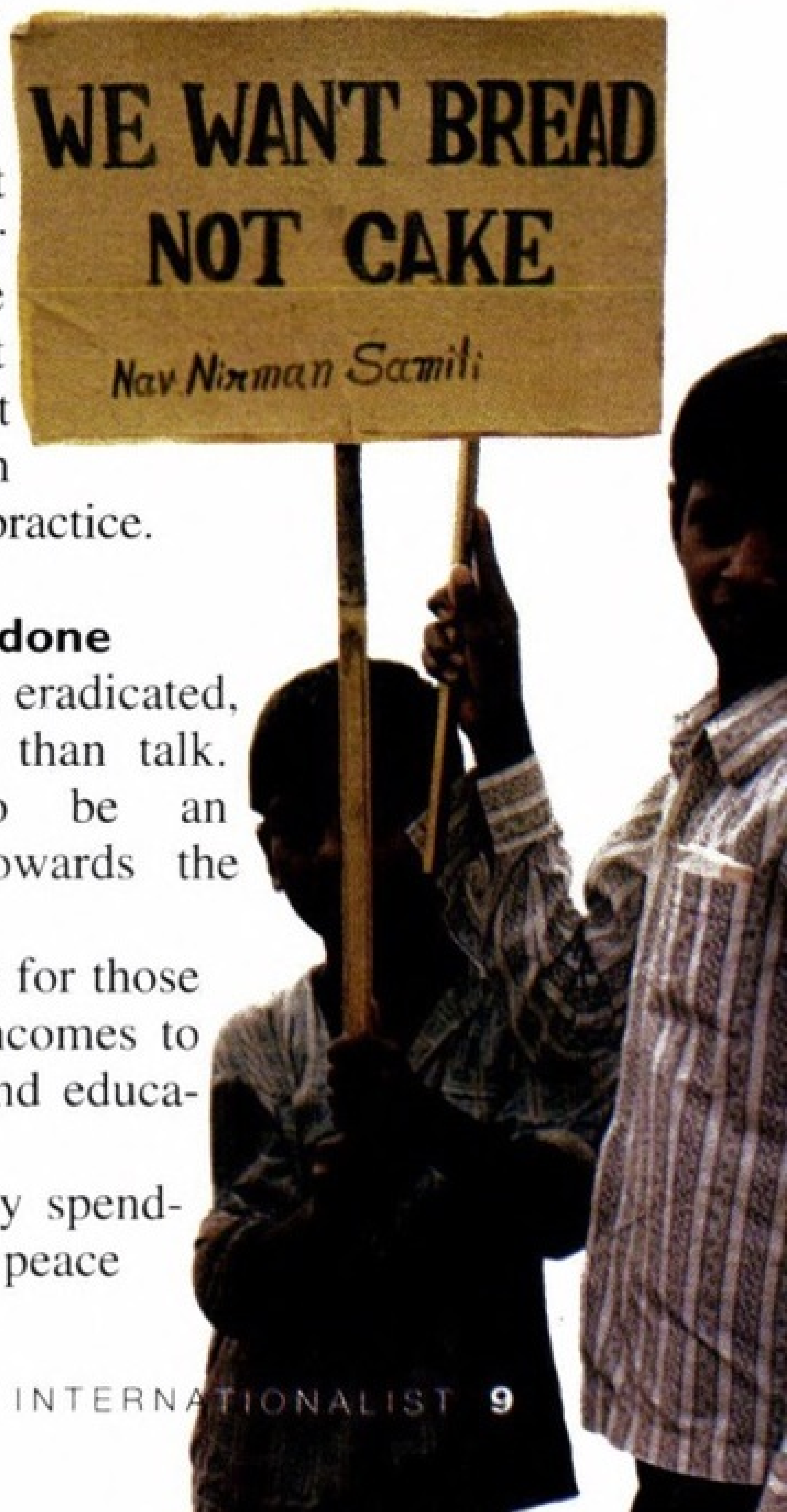
And this is not just in the Majority World. In Eastern Europe and the countries of the former Soviet Union, the average incidence of income poverty increased sevenfold between 1988 and 1994.[4] In the US, there are 35.5 million poor people.[5] In Australia poverty levels are five per cent higher than when poverty was first measured in 1973 (and likely to increase again if the Government implements the proposed new tax on food).[6] In Britain, nearly a quarter of old people and a fifth of children are poor – twice as many as in Taiwan and six times as many as in Finland. The proportion of poor people in 'income poverty' jumped by nearly 60 per cent under the Thatcher Government.

And yet the wealthiest fifth in Britain are among the richest in Europe. The most industrialized countries have 147 of the world's 225 richest people (Asia has 43 and South America 22). Globally, the gap between rich and poor is increasing all the time – the three richest people in the world have assets that exceed the combined Gross Domestic Product of the 48 least-developed countries.[7]

And yet the cost of eradicating poverty has been estimated at a mere one per cent of global income. That's about $80 billion.[4] In 1995 the world spent $800 billion – ten times that amount – on the military alone. Poverty is not just about inequality – but it is the inequality that makes poverty so appalling.

The urgency of addressing what the UN calls the 'scandal' of poverty is being recognized at the highest levels. Poverty is very much on the international agenda; the papers, the statements, the targets are pouring in with the overall aim of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015.[8]

And participation is the new buzz-word. Everyone says they want to involve poor people in the debate about what should be done. It remains to be seen if theory becomes practice.


WE WANT BREAD NOT CAKE
Nav Nirman Samiti

PAUL HARRISON / STILL PICTURES

What should be done

If poverty is to be eradicated, it must be more than talk. There needs to be an almighty push towards the following goals:

◆ providing access for those with the lowest incomes to good healthcare and education

◆ reducing military spending and promoting peace

DEXTER TIRANTI

Overseas Aid[10]

While charity is not the answer, aid can help reduce inequality and alleviate suffering, especially if it is properly targeted. And yet the amount of aid given to poor countries fell from $55.43 billion in 1996 to $47.58 billion in 1997. It needs to be increased to at least 0.7 per cent of GNP, the United Nations target.

In addition donors must:

- **Increase the amount of aid spent directly on alleviating poverty**
- **Share North-South responsibility for meeting commitments on basic health and education**
- **Shift government preoccupation away from an overwhelming focus on economics and towards the human impact of poverty**
- **Find approaches to development co-operation based on genuine partnership**

- creating employment and economic resources for poor people
- working towards a sustainable environment for all
- reducing the gender gap
- creating rural development policies which benefit the poor, such as agrarian reform
- curbing corruption
- cancelling debt
- increasing overseas aid (see above).

But many people experiencing poverty have another, even more radical point to make. One of the most extraordinary things about listening to people in poverty in different parts of the world is that so many are concerned not just about inequality, but about the way money has become the measure of all things.

Thousands of kilometres away from Devonport, in a small town in the middle of the forests of southern India, I am with a group of tribal people – considered by other Indians to be the poorest of the poor and the lowest of the low. I tell them I am working on this magazine and they urge me not just to focus on money, in words similar to Karen's in Devonport:

'It's about what you value,' says Bomman. 'When everything is valued in terms of money, it is those who have the money who are looked up to. But if we use other ways of valuing people, it is the poor who are rich...'

Bomman's words are echoed too by studies on a macro level, which show that governments which go for economic growth alone fail to address the problem of poverty.[9] It is only when social development policies go hand-in-hand with what is known as 'pro-poor' growth that poor people begin to benefit. The emphasis has to be on equity, not just economics, and on concrete policies to accompany the noble commitments to eradication.

But people experiencing poverty are often aware that any 'help' – whether from governments or charities – works best when those being 'helped' are organized in workers' movements, trade unions or women's networks. To this end, poor people are making links across the globe and learning new strategies for change from each other. This gives a strength in numbers enough to challenge the most powerful of systems.

'If the poor of the world could start supporting each other then we would have a movement strong enough to change the world,' said Chandran, one of the tribal people from India.

'We'll not give up,' said Sam in Devonport. 'If enough people keep shouting the same things loud and long then things might start to happen.'

International institutions are saying they want to listen to people in poverty. And the latter are laying siege to the assumptions we all hold about rich and poor and shaking the foundations on which wealth, status, and the myths about poverty are built.

Who knows? In the end it might even be enough to bring down the wall. Stranger things have happened. ■

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[1] 'Fighting Poverty and Social Exclusion: The European Experience' paper by Moraene Roberts, June 1998.
[2] 'Male and Female Social Exclusion' by Fenella Porter, with Ines Smyth (Oxfam 1998)
[3] From *Eradicate Poverty!* UK Coalition Against Poverty.
[4] *Human Development Report 1997* (UNDP)
[5] US Bureau of the Census
[6] Australian Council on Social Services
[7] *Human Development Report 1998* (UNDP)
[8] Goals set at the UN Social Summit in 1995.
[9] 'Global poverty reduction: are we heading in the right direction?' paper by Howard White at the DSA conference 1998.
[10] *The Reality of Aid 1998/99* (Earthscan).

G PINKHASSOV / MAGNUM

Cold shoulder in Moscow: social and economic upheavals since 1989 have meant that life expectancy has fallen from 70 in 1990 to 65 in 1997.

The Poverty Quiz

THINK YOU KNOW ROUGHLY HOW THE WORLD WORKS? See if you can match the country, person or organization to the right quote or statistic. The correct answers are on page 30.

1

IN WHICH COUNTRY DOES ONE IN NINE PEOPLE LIVE IN POVERTY?

- South Africa
- Australia
- India
- Brazil

2

HOW MUCH DO THE RICH COUNTRIES GIVE TO THE MUCH POORER ONES?

- Nothing
- $210 million
- $3,000 million
- $340,000 million

3

'WHENEVER YOU ARE IN DOUBT OR WHEN THE SELF BECOMES TOO MUCH... APPLY THE FOLLOWING TEST: RECALL THE FACE OF THE POOREST AND WEAKEST MAN (SIC) YOU HAVE SEEN AND ASK YOURSELF IF THE STEP YOU CONTEMPLATE IS GOING TO BE OF ANY USE TO HIM. WILL HE GAIN ANYTHING BY IT? WILL IT RESTORE HIM TO A CONTROL OVER HIS OWN LIFE AND DESTINY? THEN YOU WILL FIND YOUR DOUBTS AND YOUR SELF MELTING AWAY.'

- Mahatma Gandhi
- Julius Nyerere
- Nelson Mandela
- President Suharto

4

THE WORLD'S 225 RICHEST PEOPLE HAVE A COMBINED WEALTH OF OVER A MILLION MILLION DOLLARS. THIS IS THE SAME AS THE ANNUAL INCOME OF HOW MANY OF THE WORLD'S POOREST PEOPLE?

- 1 million
- 30 million
- 1,000 million
- 2,500 million

5

IN WHICH COUNTRY DO 35.5 MILLION PEOPLE – ONE CHILD IN FOUR – LIVE BELOW THE OFFICIAL POVERTY LINE?

- Zambia
- Cambodia
- Russia
- United States

6

'I'M MARRIED AND HAVE A TWO-AND-A HALF-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER. I GET UP AT 8AM AND DON'T HAVE ANYTHING TO EAT UNTIL 7 OR 8PM. I WANT MY DAUGHTER TO BE ABLE TO EAT'. WHERE IS THIS PERSON FROM?

- Uganda
- Britain
- Aotearoa/New Zealand
- India

7

WHERE DO HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF RURAL PEOPLE HAVE NO GUARANTEED WATER SUPPLY?

- Pakistan
- Papua New Guinea
- Peru
- Australia

8

WHAT PERCENTAGE OF THE UK POPULATION EXPERIENCED A SPELL OF POVERTY BETWEEN 1990 AND 1994?

- 2%
- 53%
- 31%
- 7%

9

'A SUBSTANTIAL INCREASE IN THE RESOURCES FOR FIGHTING POVERTY IN THE POOREST COUNTRIES APPEARS ENTIRELY AFFORDABLE. IT IS A MATTER OF POLITICAL COMMITMENT.'

- World Bank
- *The New Internationalist*
- The Canadian Government
- Mozambique's Prime Minister

10

THE WEST GAVE THE THIRD WORLD $47.58 BILLION IN AID IN 1997. BY WHAT PERCENTAGE WAS THIS DIFFERENT FROM THE PREVIOUS YEAR?

- *+ 2.5%*
- *+ 10%*
- *- 7.1%*
- *- 15.7%*

11

WHO SAID: 'THE NEW CENTURY IS NOT GOING TO BE NEW AT ALL IF WE OFFER ONLY CHARITY, THAT PALLIATIVE TO SATISFY THE CONSCIENCE AND KEEP THE SAME OLD SYSTEM OF HAVES AND HAVE-NOTS QUIETLY CONTAINED.'

- Nadine Gordimer
- Noam Chomsky
- Boris Yeltsin
- Tony Blair

12

IN WHAT PART OF THE WORLD HAS POVERTY INCREASED SEVEN-FOLD SINCE 1988, PUSHING AN ADDITIONAL 105 MILLION PEOPLE BELOW THE POVERTY LINE?

- Sub-Saharan Africa
- South America
- The Pacific
- Former Soviet Union

Calvin Klein and the tea pickers

What exactly is poverty? **Mari Marcel Thekaekara** travels from south India to Glasgow to Germany in pursuit of an answer.

Strange meeting: Chathi from India and Andreas from Germany find more similarities than differences.

STAN THEKAEKARA

'ARE you rich or poor?' my 11-year-old daughter Tahira was asked by her British cousin Leila. 'We're not exactly poor,' Tahira replied hesitantly. 'But we're not rich either.'

'That's silly', Leila persisted, 'you must be one or the other.'

'Compared to the *adivasi* (tribal) kids at home we're rich,' Tahira explained, 'but compared to our cousins in America we're poor.'

The conversation that followed was even more intriguing.

'Do you have a car?'

'No. But we can use the project jeep if we need it.'

'Do you have TV?'

'No. But my Gran does. We watch hers.'

'Do you have Calvin Klein jeans?'

Tahira didn't know much about jeans then. But she had fairly smart hand-me-downs from her American cousins.

To little Leila, the entire thing was bizarre. In her mind, the divide between rich and poor was absolutely clear. There was no middle path.

Throughout our visit to Britain, our concepts of wealth and poverty continued to be challenged, juxtaposed as the trip was with our experiences of ten years of working with adivasis in the Nilgiri mountains of Tamil Nadu.

Years ago I heard a Frenchman say 'I'd rather be poor in India'. And I thought: 'What utter crap.' How typical. Romanticizing India, poverty and all.

Then, in 1994, as part of a North-South exchange, my husband Stan and I came to Britain, to visit housing estates in inner-city England and Scotland. The idea was to bring over ideas about social change in India and also to reverse the usual stereotypical image of a Northern aid worker coming to help the Third World.

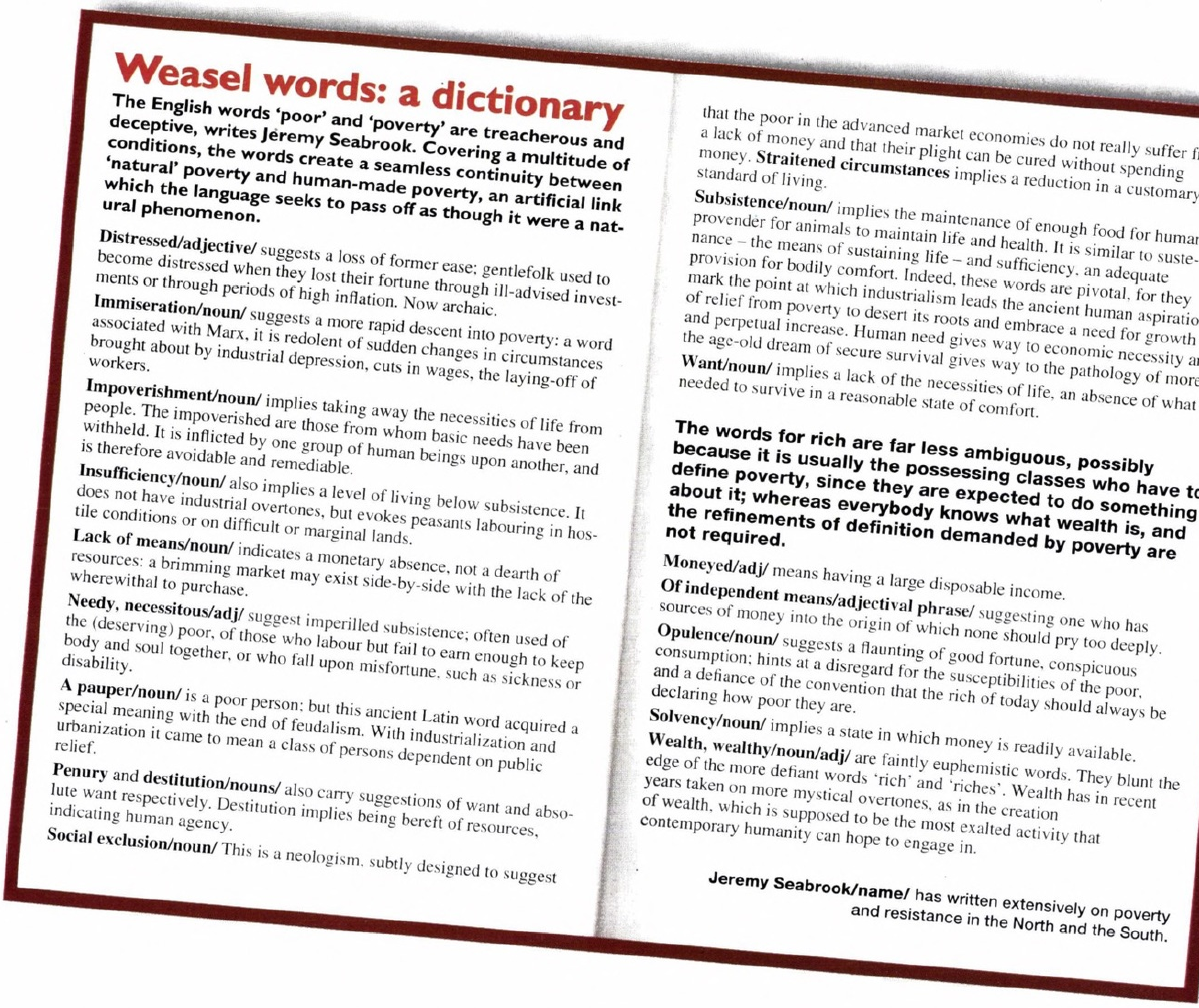
We were told that Easterhouse housing estate in Glasgow is considered Europe's worst slum. We thought this was ludicrous. These people had assured housing, electricity, hot and cold water, refrigerators, gas or electric cooking ranges. By Indian standards this was middle-class luxury. At the back of my mind, I could see anaemic, emaciated adivasi women carrying water in pots from half-a-kilometre away. Huts without electricity. Women searching for firewood every day, thankful if they had a kilo of rice to feed their families every evening. But then, suddenly, it hit us. Most of the men in Easterhouse hadn't had a job in 20 years. They were dispirited, depressed, often alcoholic. Their self-esteem had gone. Emotionally and mentally they were far worse off than the poor where we lived, even though the physical trappings of poverty were less stark.

We'd fallen into the trap of looking at poverty only from the point of view of material benefits. The Easterhouse people looked better off than the Asian poor. In reality they suffered as much social deprivation. The Easterhouse men who'd been jobless for 20 years felt far more hopeless than people in India who scrabbled in garbage heaps to sell scrap metal, paper and rags to feed their kids, though both groups were at the bottom of society. This was considered an absolutely outrageous suggestion by critics of our report.

We met young people who struggled to get a job knowing their addresses and accents were not exactly an asset. Women who couldn't fill in forms and were ashamed of the fact. In Dudley, social worker Viv Taylor helped a youngster get a decent jacket, the only really suitable outfit he possessed, to go off for an interview. He'd been ashamed to tell her this so his mother had secretly called Viv for help. It was heart-warming to hear about his jubilation when he actually got the job and set off for work. But the story reminded us of our teachers finding clothes for adivasi kids who had nothing to wear and so couldn't go to school.

The Easterhouse men felt far more hopeless than people in India who scrabbled in garbage heaps

We didn't encounter hostility or racism from the poor of Easterhouse or Dudley. Nor in Matson in Gloucester where Stan later spent a month as part of an Oxfam



Weasel words: a dictionary

**The English words 'poor' and 'poverty' are treacherous and
deceptive, writes Jeremy Seabrook. Covering a multitude of
conditions, the words create a seamless continuity between
'natural' poverty and human-made poverty, an artificial link
which the language seeks to pass off as though it were a nat-
ural phenomenon.**

Distressed/adjective/ suggests a loss of former ease; gentlefolk used to
become distressed when they lost their fortune through ill-advised invest-
ments or through periods of high inflation. Now archaic.

Immiseration/noun/ suggests a more rapid descent into poverty: a word
associated with Marx, it is redolent of sudden changes in circumstances
brought about by industrial depression, cuts in wages, the laying-off of
workers.

Impoverishment/noun/ implies taking away the necessities of life from
people. The impoverished are those from whom basic needs have been
withheld. It is inflicted by one group of human beings upon another, and
is therefore avoidable and remediable.

Insufficiency/noun/ also implies a level of living below subsistence. It
does not have industrial overtones, but evokes peasants labouring in hos-
tile conditions or on difficult or marginal lands.

Lack of means/noun/ indicates a monetary absence, not a dearth of
resources: a brimming market may exist side-by-side with the lack of the
wherewithal to purchase.

Needy, necessitous/adj/ suggest imperilled subsistence; often used of
the (deserving) poor, of those who labour but fail to earn enough to keep
body and soul together, or who fall upon misfortune, such as sickness or
disability.

A pauper/noun/ is a poor person; but this ancient Latin word acquired a
special meaning with the end of feudalism. With industrialization and
urbanization it came to mean a class of persons dependent on public
relief.

Penury and **destitution/nouns/** also carry suggestions of want and abso-
lute want respectively. Destitution implies being bereft of resources,
indicating human agency.

Social exclusion/noun/ This is a neologism, subtly designed to suggest
that the poor in the advanced market economies do not really suffer from
a lack of money and that their plight can be cured without spending
money. **Straitened circumstances** implies a reduction in a customary
standard of living.

Subsistence/noun/ implies the maintenance of enough food for humans or
provender for animals to maintain life and health. It is similar to suste-
nance – the means of sustaining life – and sufficiency, an adequate
provision for bodily comfort. Indeed, these words are pivotal, for they
mark the point at which industrialism leads the ancient human aspiration
of relief from poverty to desert its roots and embrace a need for growth
and perpetual increase. Human need gives way to economic necessity and
the age-old dream of secure survival gives way to the pathology of more.

Want/noun/ implies a lack of the necessities of life, an absence of what is
needed to survive in a reasonable state of comfort.

**The words for rich are far less ambiguous, possibly
because it is usually the possessing classes who have to
define poverty, since they are expected to do something
about it; whereas everybody knows what wealth is, and
the refinements of definition demanded by poverty are
not required.**

Moneyed/adj/ means having a large disposable income.

Of independent means/adjectival phrase/ suggesting one who has
sources of money into the origin of which none should pry too deeply.

Opulence/noun/ suggests a flaunting of good fortune, conspicuous
consumption; hints at a disregard for the susceptibilities of the poor,
and a defiance of the convention that the rich of today should always be
declaring how poor they are.

Solvency/noun/ implies a state in which money is readily available.

Wealth, wealthy/noun/adj/ are faintly euphemistic words. They blunt the
edge of the more defiant words 'rich' and 'riches'. Wealth has in recent
years taken on more mystical overtones, as in the creation
of wealth, which is supposed to be the most exalted activity that
contemporary humanity can hope to engage in.

Jeremy Seabrook/name/ has written extensively on poverty
and resistance in the North and the South.

programme. But we did run into massive criticism, both hostile and racist, from the local press. 'Can Oxfam spot the difference?' ran one press clipping showing a skeletal, starving African child juxtaposed with a bunch of healthy British kids. Bob Holman, writer, social worker and our host in Easterhouse, had shown us underdeveloped Scottish children. A whole generation were growing up a head shorter, smaller than their parents and grandparents. But malnutrition in Britain! Even we were amazed. Lack of protein was a Third World problem, surely. Yet the examples were there. And to change these perceptions in people who were determined not to see them was incredibly difficult.

The adivasis didn't see themselves as poor. They saw themselves as people without money

Interestingly, poor people themselves often spot the similarities immediately. They see beyond the physical differences and empathize with each other. Which brings them closer to each other than to the rich of their respective countries who at best can only sympathize with them.

It occurred to us then that even people working in development talked about wealth and poverty using a very narrow definition. We use cash as the sole measure. I've often read articles implying someone was destitute because they earned only a dollar a day. In India (and in other parts of the world, I imagine) a dollar a day would be a decent wage for a poor person. Whereas a North American or European would consider it shockingly little.

Most of us fall into the trap of working towards alleviating physical poverty thinking this is the solution to all ills. Economic prosperity, wealth, better incomes are put forward as ideals to aspire to. Yet paradoxically, at a totally different level, we attack the wave of consumerism which seems to engulf everyone, rich and poor.

In 1995, the adivasis took the challenge further. At a meeting to look critically at the last ten years, the adivasis were clear about their own notions of wealth: 'Our community, our children, our unity, our culture, the forest.' Money was not mentioned at all. We, the non-adivasis in the team, were stunned.

As we discussed concepts of poverty further, we realized that the adivasis didn't see themselves as poor. They saw themselves as people without money. It took a little bit of concentrated thinking for me to absorb that this was not necessarily the same thing.

Some other things happened to turn our stereotypical concepts on their heads. Community Aid Abroad approached us to invite a group of Aboriginal Australians to visit. Our people were shocked beyond words by the Australian stories, of children wrenched from their families, of the treatment meted out to them. Some of the visitors had personal experiences to recount. They themselves had been torn from their parents as kids and sent to white people's homes or institutions. For months afterwards, the adivasis talked about the visitors. 'Poor people, how they've suffered,' they said. 'Our problems are nothing compared to what they've been through.'

A poverty-stricken Indian saying 'poor thing' to an Australian might strike an outsider as slightly ironic, but the experience was even more surreal when we visited Germany. There had been a six-year ongoing link between a group of German students and our project. So in 1997, when six adivasis were invited to Germany, the visit generated excitement along with a great deal of trepidation. For the adivasis, this was a very big first. A pretty big plunge from their forest, mountain, village world into super-developed Germany. We wondered how they'd cope with the sudden exposure to great material wealth straight after stark poverty.

Their reactions amazed me. I realized later that what made their observations different was the fact that they did not look at the West as a kind of Mecca where you would find everything material you seek. This is in complete contrast to most other visitors who go there either as immigrants or tourists but always with shopping lists. The adivasis didn't hanker after German goodies. 'It's very nice to be here,' Chathi, one of the six, told me. 'But I couldn't live here. It's not my place. A man needs his family, his community, his own people around him. Just money can't give you a life. You'd shrivel up and die.'

They were speechless when they saw an old people's home. The concept was totally alien to them. 'How can children send their old parents to live alone?' they eventually asked in wonder. And later, in a meeting, Radhakrishnan, another of the six, solemnly resolved: 'We must ensure that such things never happen in our society, no matter how much we progress.'

Like Stan and me in Easterhouse, the adivasis were shocked at the spectre of unemployment which haunted some of our young German friends. They were particularly upset when Karl, whose commune home they lived in, came back stressed by the news that he might soon become redundant. Bomman worried all night about his friend. In the morning he announced: 'I have an idea. I can make bamboo flutes in Gudalur and Karl can sell them here till he finds a job.'

He did too. And though Karl did not lose his job after all, Bomman's concern was profoundly moving to everyone who saw it. That Bomman didn't feel at all poverty-stricken was evident to all of us, though by the standards of Karl's family, he definitely was.

German friends gave the group warm clothes and gifts for their families. They were happy to bring back presents for their children. But paradoxically, (because of

Owning up: tea pickers – normally women – on the estate bought by the adivasis themselves to export tea to other poor communities.

NIKKI VAN DER GAAG

our concern about the possible effect of a consumerist onslaught) the gift that Bomman and the adivasis valued most from Germany was that everyone treated them with respect and dignity. As equals. It was a terrible indictment of Indian society. And I was filled with shame at the realization that they'd experienced more respect and egalitarianism in a month in Germany than in their whole lives in India.

For us the whole visit was an exercise in humility which made us stop and think. It struck me forcibly that the only way to change stereotypes is to come face to face with people. In London, friends said 'Easterhouse! God, you've been going places! Wouldn't like my car to break down there.'

The Easterhouse people were lovely. We really enjoyed meeting them. This is not an attempt to romanticize the problem, but merely to state that stereotypes are equally ridiculous. I'm aware that meeting a neo-Nazi or a Chicago gangster on a dark, lonely night could have the effect of liberating you from all your earthly problems altogether; more instantaneously than you'd care to go.

The different visits also had unexpected spin-offs. Gudalur, in the Nilgiri mountains of south India, is tea country. In Gloucester, people drink tons of tea, paying three times the necessary price. The Gudalur adivasis produce tons of tea getting a third of the consumer price. Why not send our tea directly to Matson? And to friends in Germany and other parts of India...

In addition, the adivasis' visit to Germany gave them new confidence when it came to challenging the transnational companies who had evicted them from land they had owned for generations. Bomman, fresh from his overseas visit, stood in the village square and delivered an impassioned speech.

'This is a company controlling thousands of hectares. Yet they are not ashamed to evict poor adivasis who have under a quarter of a hectare of tea. Unilever is very powerful. But the days when adivasis were totally powerless are over. We now have friends in Germany and UK. We've met people working for Fair Trade. If we tell them what Unilever is doing here they will start a campaign to inform all the people of Europe to stop buying Unilever tea. They will fight on our side. We are no longer alone.'

Unilever backed off. The global links between people usually considered poor and therefore powerless had made a difference. To use Stan's favourite slogan, 'If there has to be globalization, let's create a world of our own choosing!' ■

Mari Marcel Thekaekara co-edited this issue and works with adivasis in Gudalur, India.

Out but not down: Julia Chesson is evicted but refuses to give up.

PAUL EFIRD

Chesson's choice

Resistance is growing in the richest country in the world. **Tom Waters** reports.

NOVEMBER 10, 1998, was a sunny day in Knoxville, Tennessee. Early in the morning, 12 sheriff's deputies arrived at the home of Julia Chesson.

Chesson's home was a small apartment in a cluster of plain brick buildings surrounded by a grassy park with tall shade trees – a subsidized housing development called College Homes, managed by Knoxville's Community Development Corporation and occupied, until recently, primarily by black people.

The deputies ordered Chesson and her daughter to vacate and began gathering up their possessions to take to another housing development a few kilometres away. They did not do the moving with a great deal of care.

'They tore up my waterbed and got bleach and salt all over my food,' Chesson said. 'They also wrapped my little girl's stuff in two bed sheets and dragged them. They put holes in my sheets. Why would they want to do me this way, because I stand up for the poor? Somebody's got to.'

This was not an ordinary eviction, but it was in some ways a typical confrontation between government officials and poor people over the nature of poverty. Chesson and her daughters were the last hold-outs, the bitter-enders, in a struggle over the future of College Homes. The Development Corporation wanted to evict tenants from all 320 apartments, tear the development down, and build 230 new units of housing for a mix of low- and middle-income families. The Chessons and four other families had defied orders to leave and filed a lawsuit to block the demolition, saying that poor and black families were being displaced to make room for white families with more money. (The new houses were expected to sell for between $30,000 and $85,000, while Chesson makes only $5.48 an hour working for the area's school system.)

'All they care about is the money,' Chesson said. 'It doesn't benefit poor people.' Residents demanded that instead of demolishing College Homes, the development should be sold to a tenant group or

LOCAL 420 DC 37 AFSCME AFL-CIO SAYS:
Mr. GIULIANI, PUBLIC HOSPITALS ARE FOR THE UNINSURED!!
Mr. GIULIANI, PUBLIC HOSPITALS SAVE LIVES!!
420

Public protest: city hospital workers demonstrate in favour of New York's public hospitals – used especially by those who can't afford insurance.

STACY ROSENSTOCK / FORMAT

tenants be allowed to manage the property. But this was to be the last day of their protest. Several court decisions had gone against the protesters. By the end of the day, College Homes was ready to receive its demolition crew.

'What we were fighting for was to get our youth off the streets, to get out of poverty, and to get control of our own community,' explained Chesson. 'Now I'm out here in my new neighborhood registering people to vote. Because when they're done with one housing project they'll come for the next.'

The solution proposed for the poverty of College Homes seemed to assume that poor people and their communities are the problem. But Chesson and others believe the real problem is that poor people lack the power to run their own lives and improve conditions in their communities.

There are 35.5 million people who make up the 13 per cent of the population defined as poor. The official definition of poverty used in the US takes no account of the political powerlessness that Chesson is trying to undo. Nor does it take account of the cultural traits associated with poverty by many governmental policy-makers. Instead, poverty is officially defined as a strictly economic deprivation, based on specific thresholds set for families of different sizes. In 1997 the threshold for a family of one adult and two children was set at $12,931. The average poor family of this size received only $6,329.

A central experience of poor people is simply being pushed around

Poor people are not a random cross-section of the population, of course, because poverty does not come randomly. You are more likely to be poor if you are black, if you are Latino, if you are a woman, or if you are under 18 years old. In 1997, the poverty rate for black individuals was 26.5 per cent and that for Hispanic people (this is the word favored by the US Census Bureau for Latinos) was 27 per cent. Women had a poverty rate of 15 per cent in 1993, compared to 10 per cent for men, and the rate for children was 23 per cent.

Families in poverty

The significance of these figures becomes clearer when you look at how poverty hits families. In 1993, families with single mothers had a poverty rate of 52 per cent, compared to 16 per cent for all families. This high rate of poverty happens because women are concentrated in low-paid jobs and they provide much of the childcare in the US without being paid at all.

The poverty rate in the US since 1970 has been relatively constant, but this conceals a very significant change for the worse. Poverty has become much more concentrated geographically. In other words, poor people today are more likely to live in poor neighborhoods, defined as those where 40 per cent or more of the people are poor. This growth of concentrated poverty is alarming because it is likely to expose poor people to many of the worst of the social dimensions of poverty – crime, low-quality education, lack of opportunities for young people, a toxic environment, and loss of political power and influence. It also makes the realities of poverty less visible to better-off people, who may become more willing to accept governmental policies that punish poor people.

In the 1960s, however, there was a rapid reduction of poverty which suggests that real change can happen when government takes action in response to politically mobilized poor people.

The question is: how can poor people and their allies bring about another situation like that one? Movements springing up around the United States offer several different answers.

Many of these new movements are linked to issues of self-determination and identity for particular groups of poor people. For example, Julia Chesson and other tenants of College Homes could draw on a long tradition of groups of poor black Americans demanding autonomous control over their own neighborhoods. In many other cities, groups of black, Latino, and Asian-American low-wage workers have organized through workers' centers, which deal with workplace and sometimes also community issues from a culturally specific perspective. Mothers who receive government assistance are co-ordinating across the country, arguing that their work raising children deserves both respect and economic support.

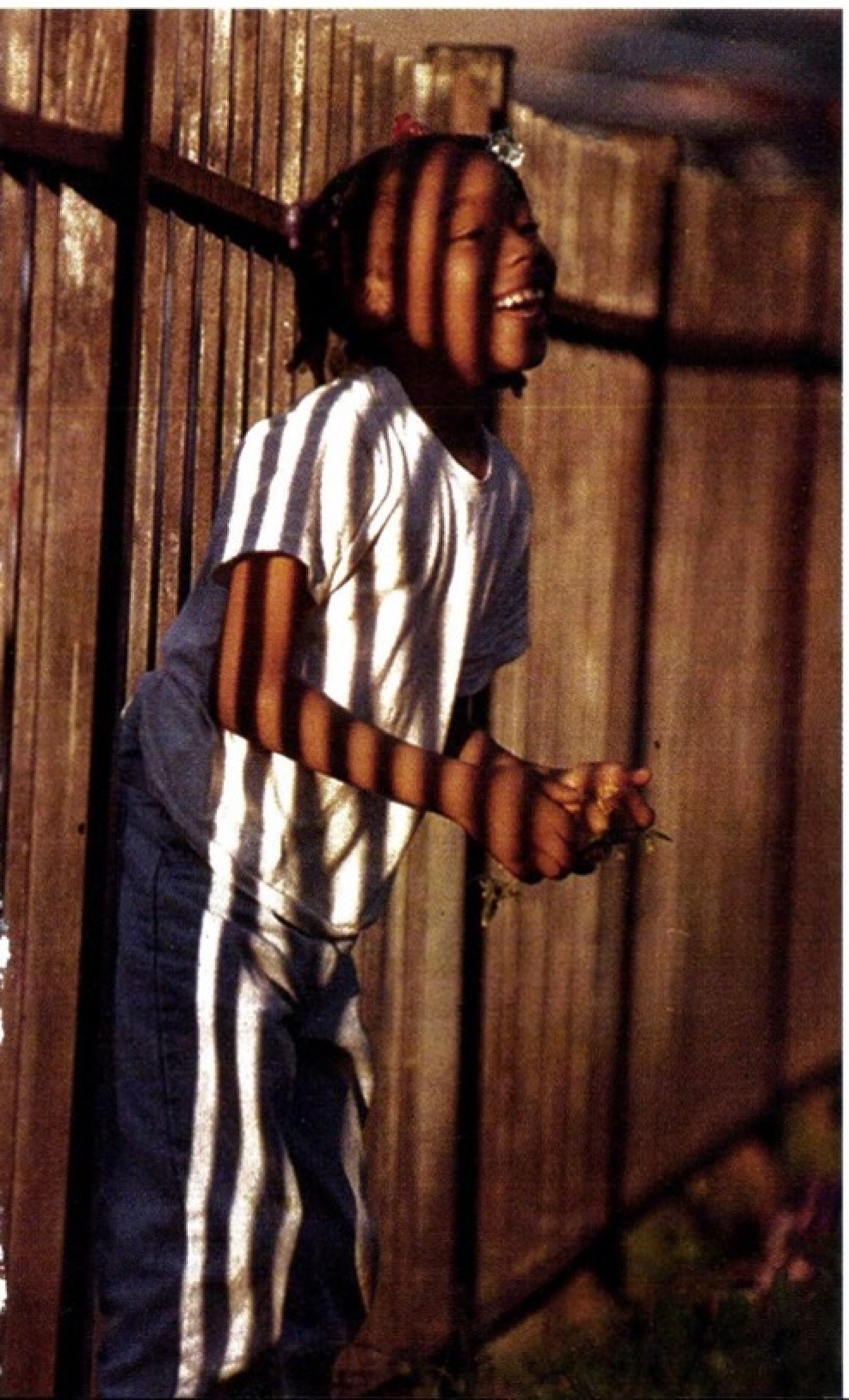
These movements have been responsible for some of the most innovative organizing in the United States, and they have been particularly effective at exposing the political dimension of poverty: the fact

that a central experience of poor people is simply being pushed around. They have also produced many of the most militant grassroots activists fighting poverty.

At the same time, other groups have pioneered new bridge-building approaches to anti-poverty organizing. These efforts do not necessarily produce the same level of militancy as the more identity-based campaigns, but they do have the advantage of presenting a more united front to business and government decision-makers and offering a more coherent big-picture view of the economic roots of poverty.

Often the bridge-building takes a very direct form. Several groups around the US, including the Knoxville-based Tennessee Industrial Renewal Network (TIRN), sponsor exchanges between North American and Mexican industrial workers who work for the same transnational corporations. These trips combat the idea that it is Mexican workers rather than employers who are subjecting North American workers to poverty by taking jobs away. They also build support in both countries for political initiatives that benefit all workers, such as the campaigns against the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and other international agreements that increase employers' power at the expense of workers.

Cross-border organizers generally see globalization and the political might of the transnational corporations as an important cause of poverty in all countries. The argument is particularly compelling in the US, where very low unemployment rates have for several years failed to raise wages substantially or lower the poverty rate.



PAUL EFIRD

Back against the fence but still smiling: a child in Knoxville.

'I think that until everyone here and everyone there get together, the big companies will continue to take their jobs to South-East Asia or wherever they can get the cheapest labor,' said Barbara Knight, a TIRN activist and former Philips Consumer Electronics worker who has visited Philips workers in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

Living wage

The fastest-growing type of coalition-building projects are living-wage campaigns. These bring together labor, community and church organizations to press for local laws that set a minimum wage higher than the US federal minimum. They are targeted at certain local-government employers, or companies which hold contracts with, or receive subsidies or tax concessions from, local governments.

In Knoxville, a living-wage campaign has emerged from a series of economic literacy workshops and interviews with organizational leaders conducted by TIRN. The campaign is run democratically by a committee that includes leaders and staff of a poor people's organization, a student organization, and several labor unions including the local arm of the national labor federation. The campaign also involves a number of church ministers, who often play an important role in grassroots initiatives in the United States.

'We did a listening project four years ago, talking about what it would take for poor and working people to have more power over the economy here,' said Bob Becker, a staff organizer for TIRN. 'One of the things we heard was that groups of poor and working people didn't know each other, and they need to. So this is about more than a living wage. It's about building power for poor and working people in this town through coalitions.'

If Knoxville's living-wage campaign is successful, several hundred workers will receive a substantial wage increase immediately, and more workers will benefit if the initial increases affect the wage market in particular job categories. But more importantly, the campaign will have demonstrated that wage levels are affected by political power, and it will have created relationships between working-class groups that are often divided, such as union workers and non-union poor people. This will have the potential to affect future policy decisions.

Solutions to Issues of Concern to Knoxvillians (SICK) is a community organization made up primarily of poor people. Michelle Nored, a low-wage worker and welfare recipient is a member of SICK. She believes that jobs are crucial. But so are the misconceptions others hold about poor people: 'The demonization of the poor is the most atrocious, the assumption that poor people are dishonest and criminal and the source of everything bad about society,' she said. 'The living-wage campaign gives us a chance to show how the real force in poverty is simply lack.'

The rise and rise of poverty in the US

FROM 1970 TO 1990, the number of individuals living in poverty climbed from 25 million to 33 million – an increase of 32 per cent. During the same period, the number of people living in concentrated poverty (in other words both they and their neighborhoods were poor) climbed from 4.1 million to 8 million – an increase of 92 per cent. (Total population climbed 22 per cent.) For black people the situation is even worse: in 1990, 42 per cent of poor black people lived in concentrated poverty, while only 8 per cent of poor white people and 33 per cent of poor Latinos did so.

Living-wage campaigns have already won wage increases in many large cities, including Baltimore, Milwaukee and Los Angeles. Some of the increases have been small, but the trend seems to be towards higher minimums. The Knoxville campaign is proposing a minimum of $9.50 per hour if health benefits are provided and $11.00 per hour if they are not.

Most important, the campaigns are beginning to create a nationwide climate in which it is less unusual for unions and poor people's groups to work together. The phrase 'living wage' has begun to penetrate the national consciousness and to be heard on the TV news. If these trends continue, they will not only lead to more effective coalitions, they will also decrease the isolation of groups like Julia Chesson's and make it more difficult for institutions like Knoxville's Community Development Corporation to define poverty as something wrong with poor people. ■

Tom Waters is an organizer and writer in Knoxville, Tennessee. He has worked with SICK, with TIRN's living-wage campaign, and with Save Our Cumberland Mountains and the Commission on Religion in Appalachia in rural East Tennessee.

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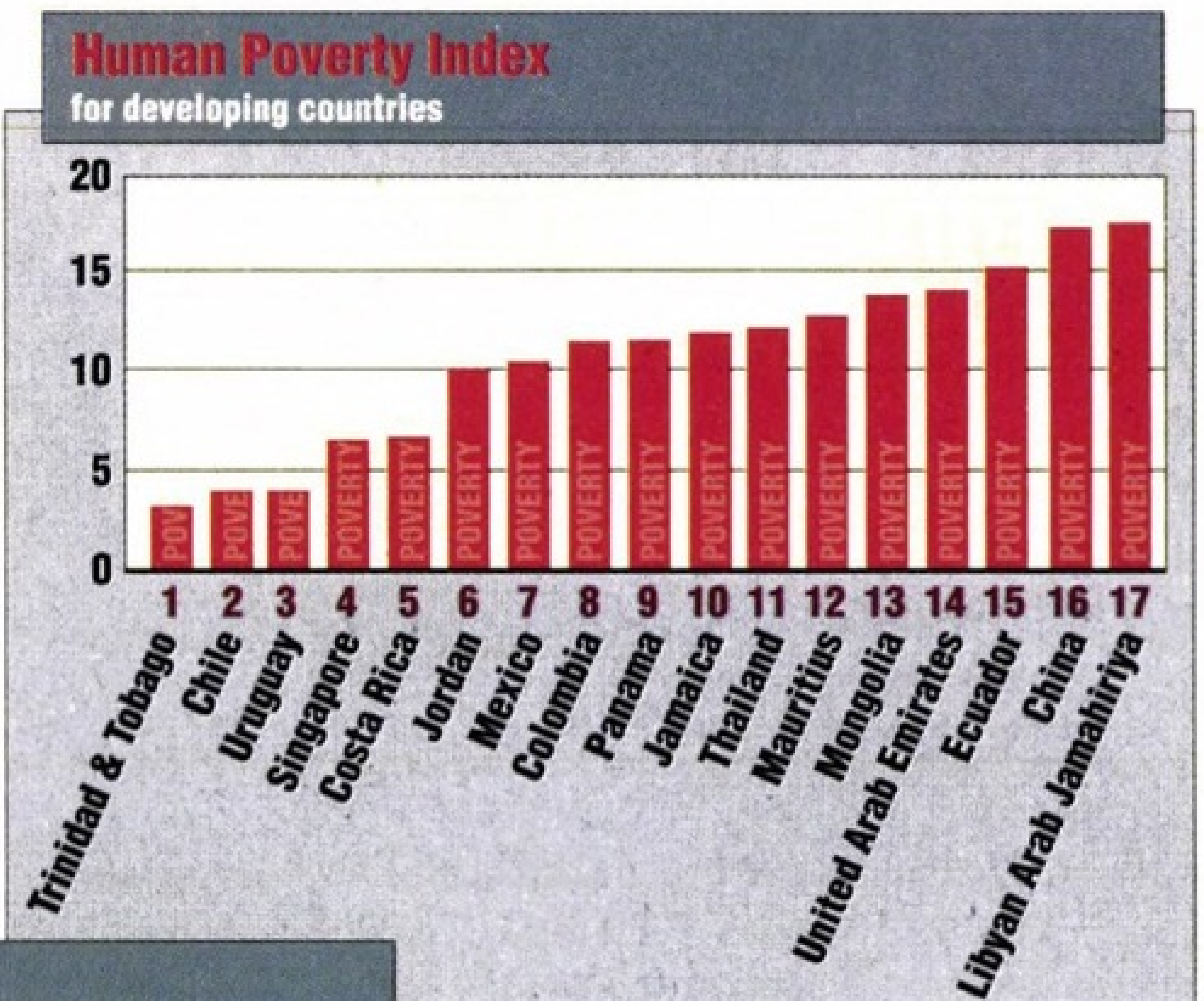
DEFINING POVERTY...

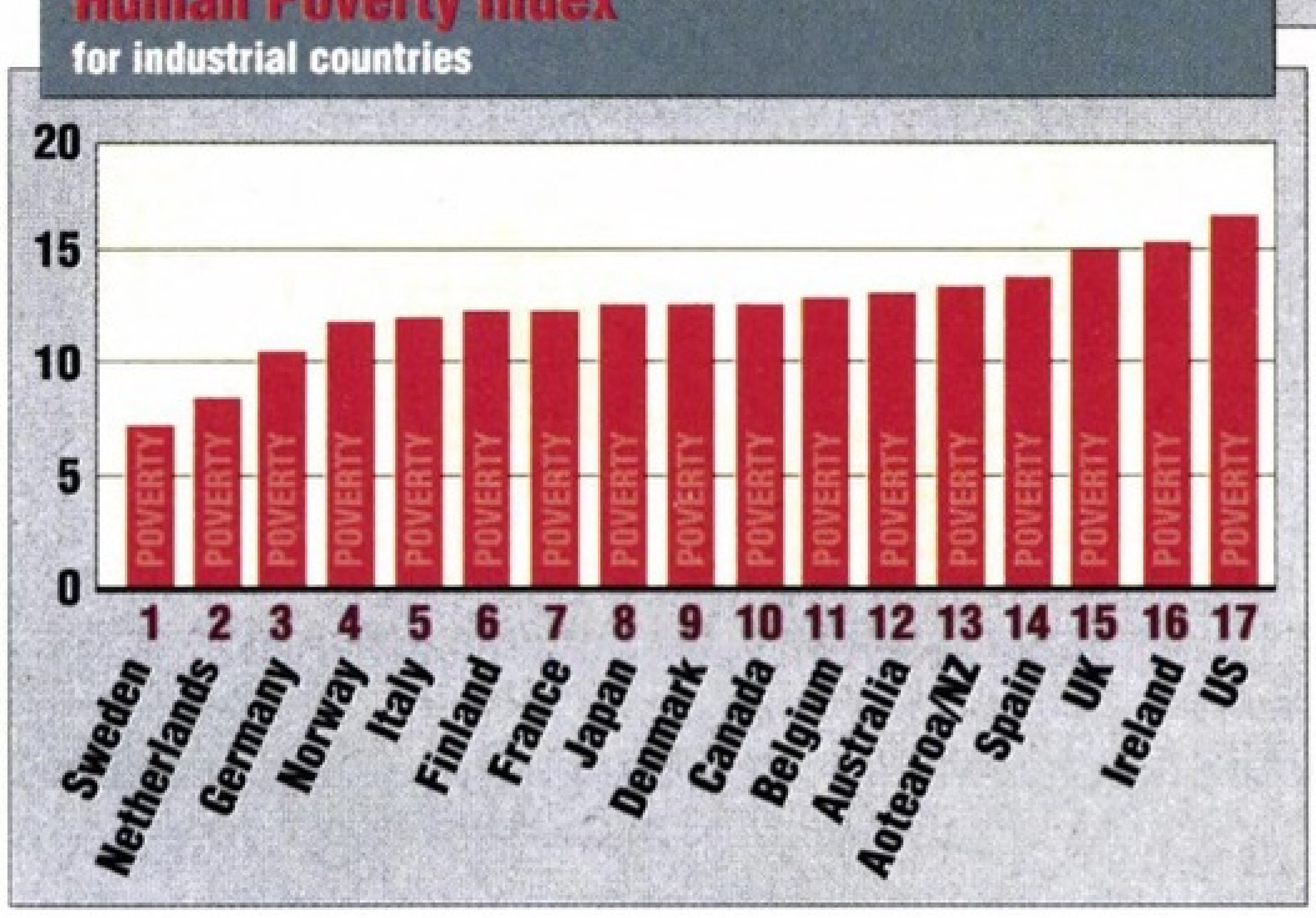
Absolute poverty is defined according to an absolute minimum standard, often called the 'poverty line'. **Relative poverty** means that you are poor in relation to those around you. **Income poverty** ('less than a dollar a day', for example), means that you are poor if you have less money than the defined poverty line for your country. **Human poverty** takes into account other factors, such as life expectancy, infant malnutrition, illiteracy and lack of food or clean water. **Basic needs** definitions also go beyond money, to include all the things that a person needs in order to survive – including employment and participation in society.

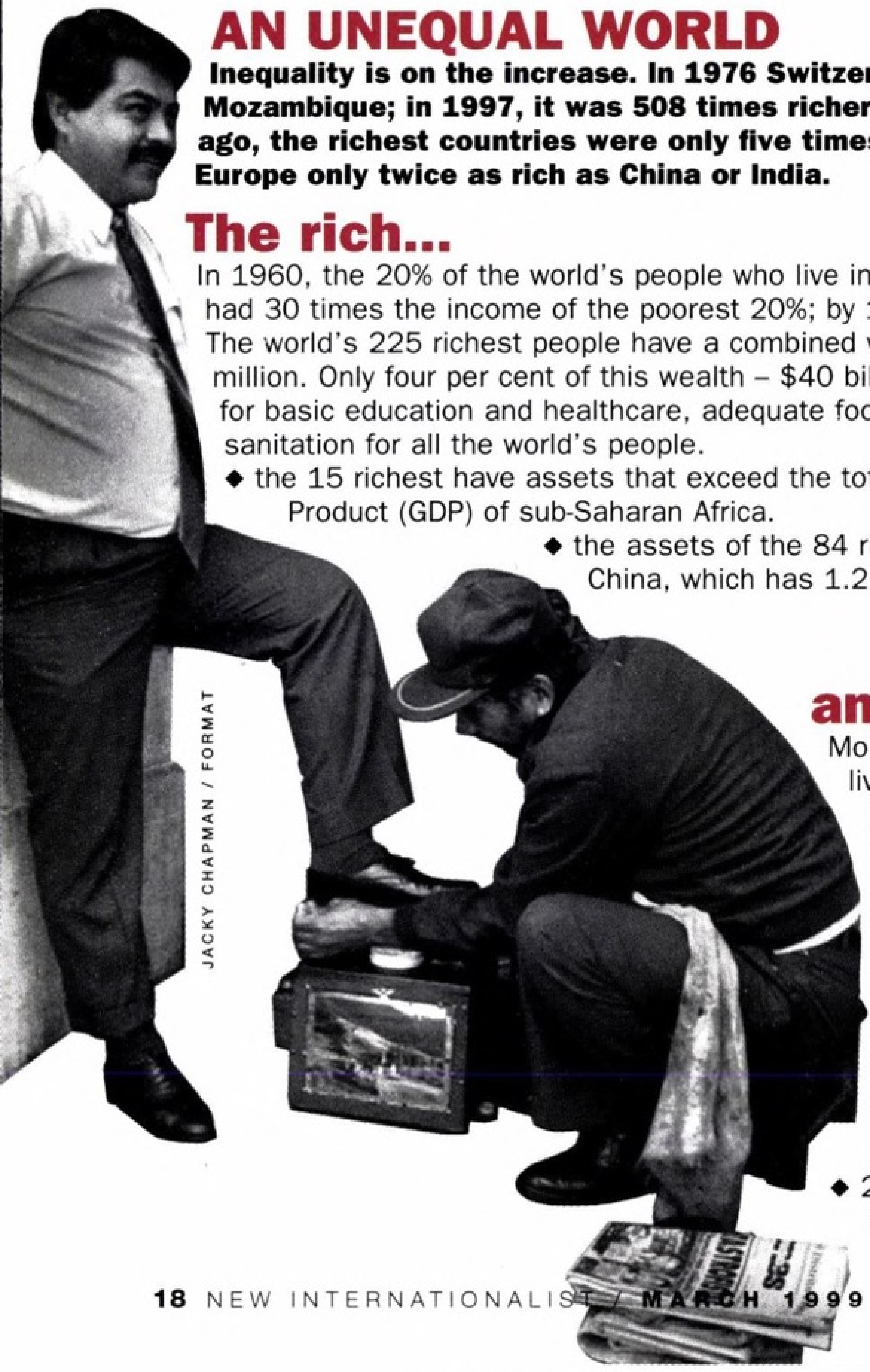
MEASURING POVERTY...

Measuring poverty is always a problem, especially if you recognize that just using money is not enough. There are a number of new measurements emerging, like the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare.[1] This measures 'quality' economic activity by, for example, making a subtraction for air pollution and an addition for unpaid household labour.

Another method is the **Human Poverty Index**. This is ranked according to three main areas of deprivation: survival; knowledge and a decent standard of living. In the industrial world, where the Index also includes social exclusion, some 7 to 17% of the populations are classified as poor. The higher the percentage figure, the greater the poverty in that country.







JACKY CHAPMAN / FORMAT

AN UNEQUAL WORLD

Inequality is on the increase. In 1976 Switzerland was 52 times richer than Mozambique; in 1997, it was 508 times richer. Two hundred and fifty years ago, the richest countries were only five times richer than the poorest, and Europe only twice as rich as China or India.

The rich...

In 1960, the 20% of the world's people who live in the richest countries had 30 times the income of the poorest 20%; by 1995 it was 82 times. The world's 225 richest people have a combined wealth of over $1 million million. Only four per cent of this wealth – $40 billion – would be enough for basic education and healthcare, adequate food and safe water and sanitation for all the world's people.

◆ the 15 richest have assets that exceed the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of sub-Saharan Africa.

◆ the assets of the 84 richest exceed the GDP of China, which has 1.2 billion inhabitants.

and poor...

More than a thousand million people still live in poverty, a tenth of them in the industrialized world.

◆ Of the 4,400 million people in the Majority World, nearly 60% lack basic sanitation and more than 30% have no access to clean water.

◆ 25% do not have adequate housing.

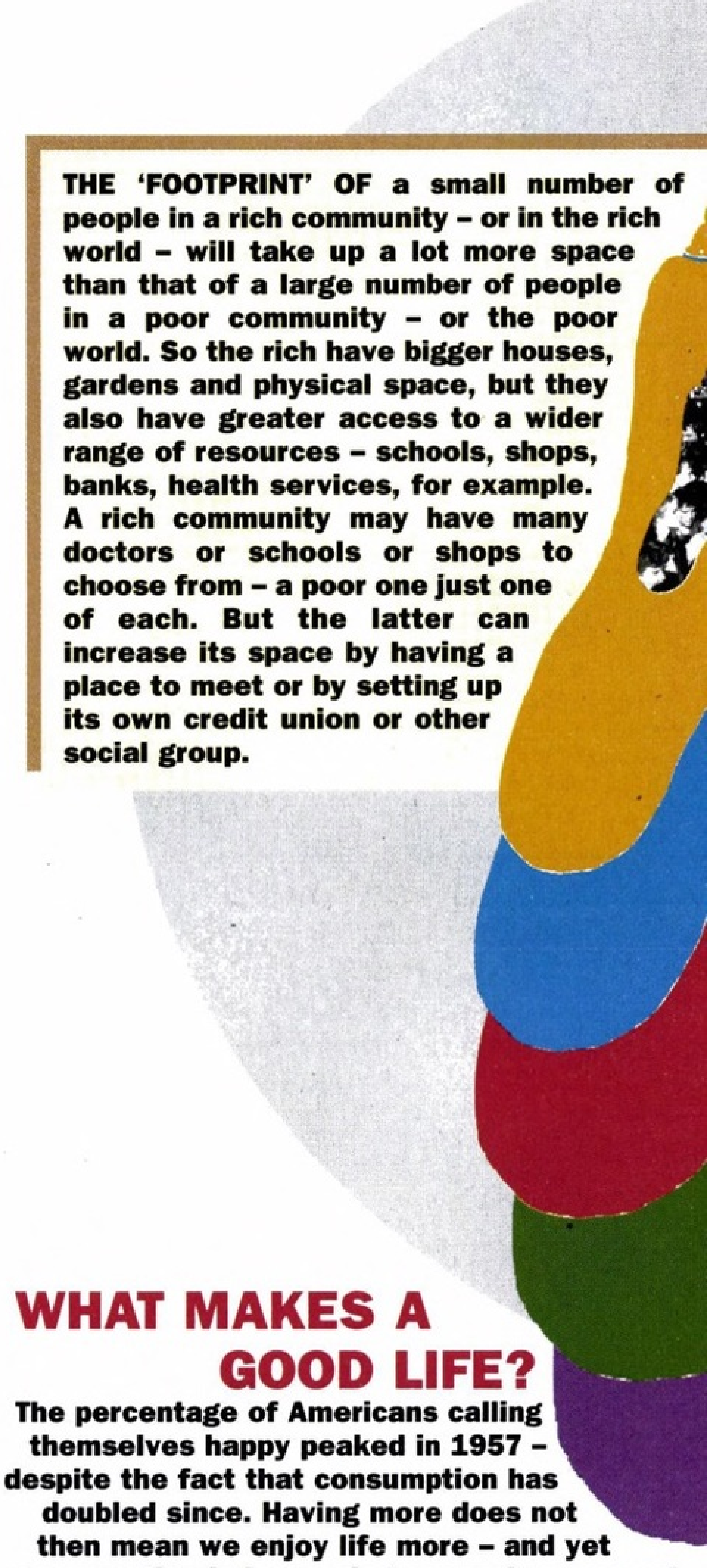
◆ 20% have no access to modern health services. Two thousand million women are anaemic (including 55 million in the industrial world).

◆ 20% of children in the world do not attend school to grade five.

POOR AND R

THE GOOD NEWS: in the past 50 years
Since 1960 child-death rates have bee
Developing countries have covered as
past 30 years as the industrial world m

THE BAD NEWS: one in four of the worl
women than for men; and for black peo
increasing numbers of people do not h



THE 'FOOTPRINT' OF a small number of people in a rich community – or in the rich world – will take up a lot more space than that of a large number of people in a poor community – or the poor world. So the rich have bigger houses, gardens and physical space, but they also have greater access to a wider range of resources – schools, shops, banks, health services, for example. A rich community may have many doctors or schools or shops to choose from – a poor one just one of each. But the latter can increase its space by having a place to meet or by setting up its own credit union or other social group.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD LIFE?

The percentage of Americans calling themselves happy peaked in 1957 – despite the fact that consumption has doubled since. Having more does not then mean we enjoy life more – and yet consumption is increasing everywhere except in Africa, where the average household consum
less than it did 25 yea

SURVEY OF CONSUMPTION WANTS AND NEEDS IN THE US

Percentage of respondents	**1975**	**1991**
Vacation home	19	35
Swimming pool	14	19
Job that pays more	45	60
Interesting job	38	38
Happy marriage	84	77
What is a necessity?	**1973**	**1996**
Second television	3	10
Home air conditioning	26	51

CH – THE FACTS

overty has fallen more than in the previous 500.
halved and malnutrition has declined by a third.
nuch distance in human development during the
naged in over 100.

s people still live in severe poverty. It's worse for
e than for white. Even in the so-called 'rich' world
ve enough to live on.

20%
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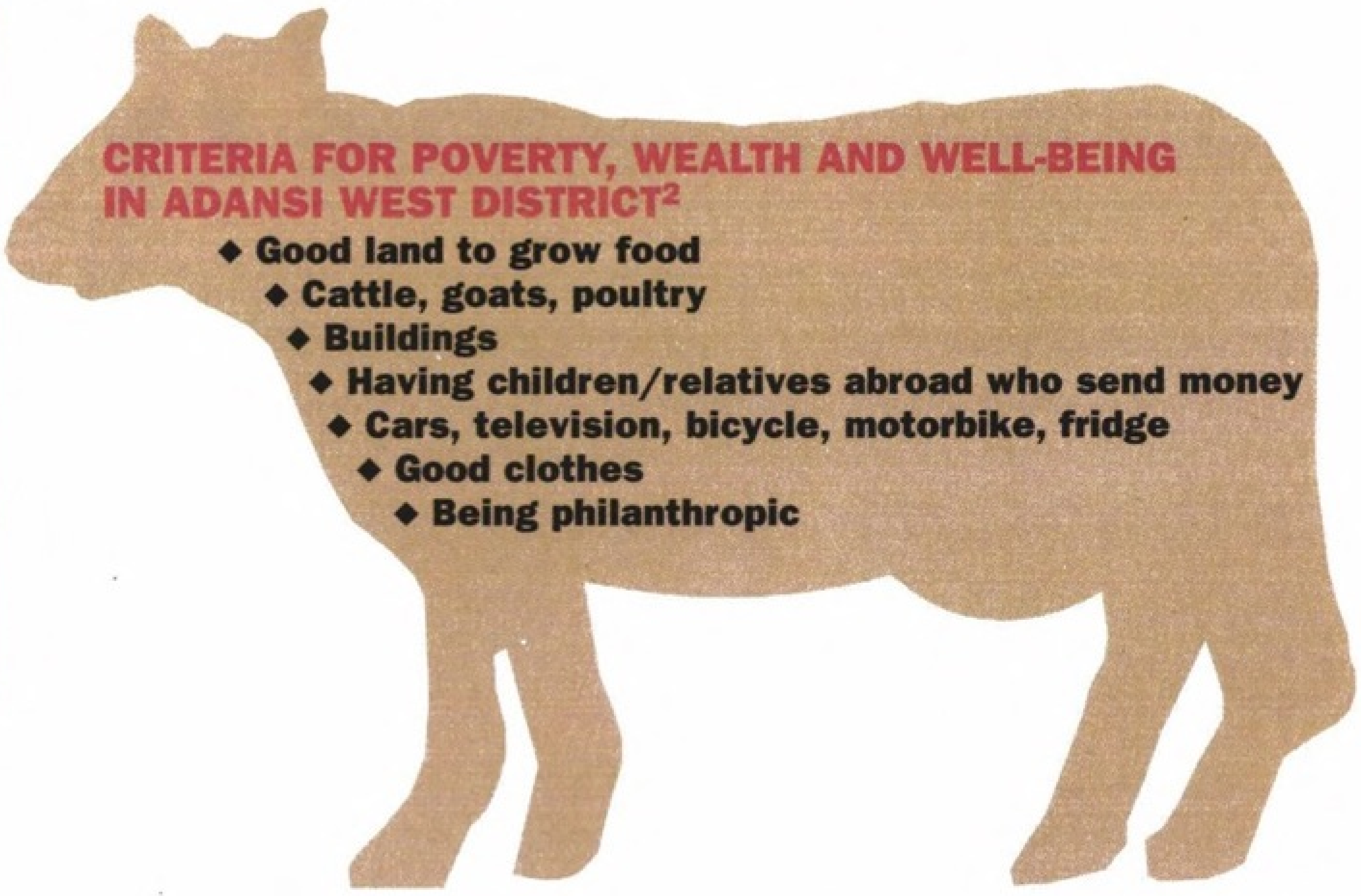
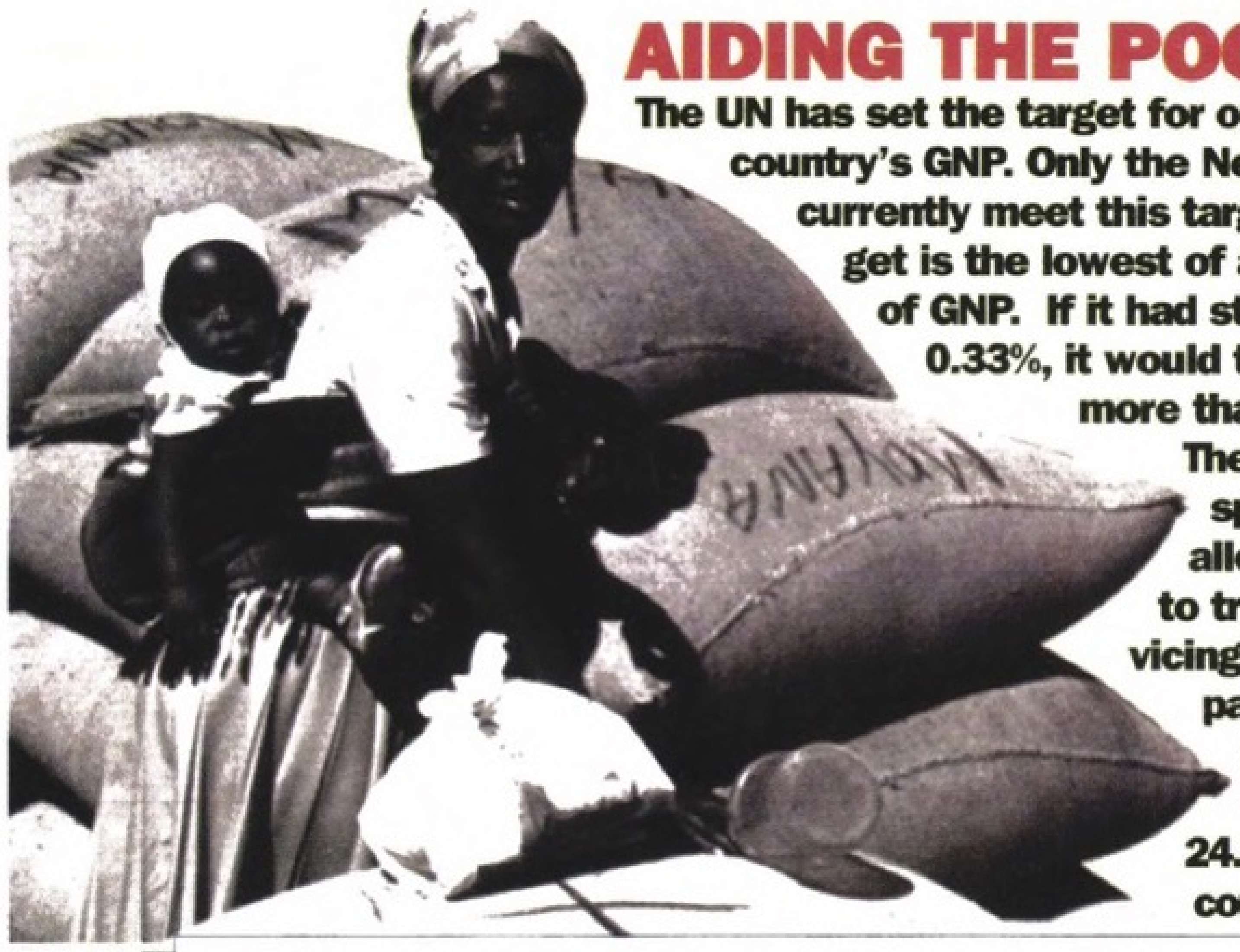
GHANA

'Being poor' in this survey meant being unemployed, unhealthy, unable to take care of your family, not being able to afford clothes or proper food, not being listened to, and being 'lazy'.



CRITERIA FOR POVERTY, WEALTH AND WELL-BEING IN ADANSI WEST DISTRICT[2]

- Good land to grow food
- Cattle, goats, poultry
- Buildings
- Having children/relatives abroad who send money
- Cars, television, bicycle, motorbike, fridge
- Good clothes
- Being philanthropic

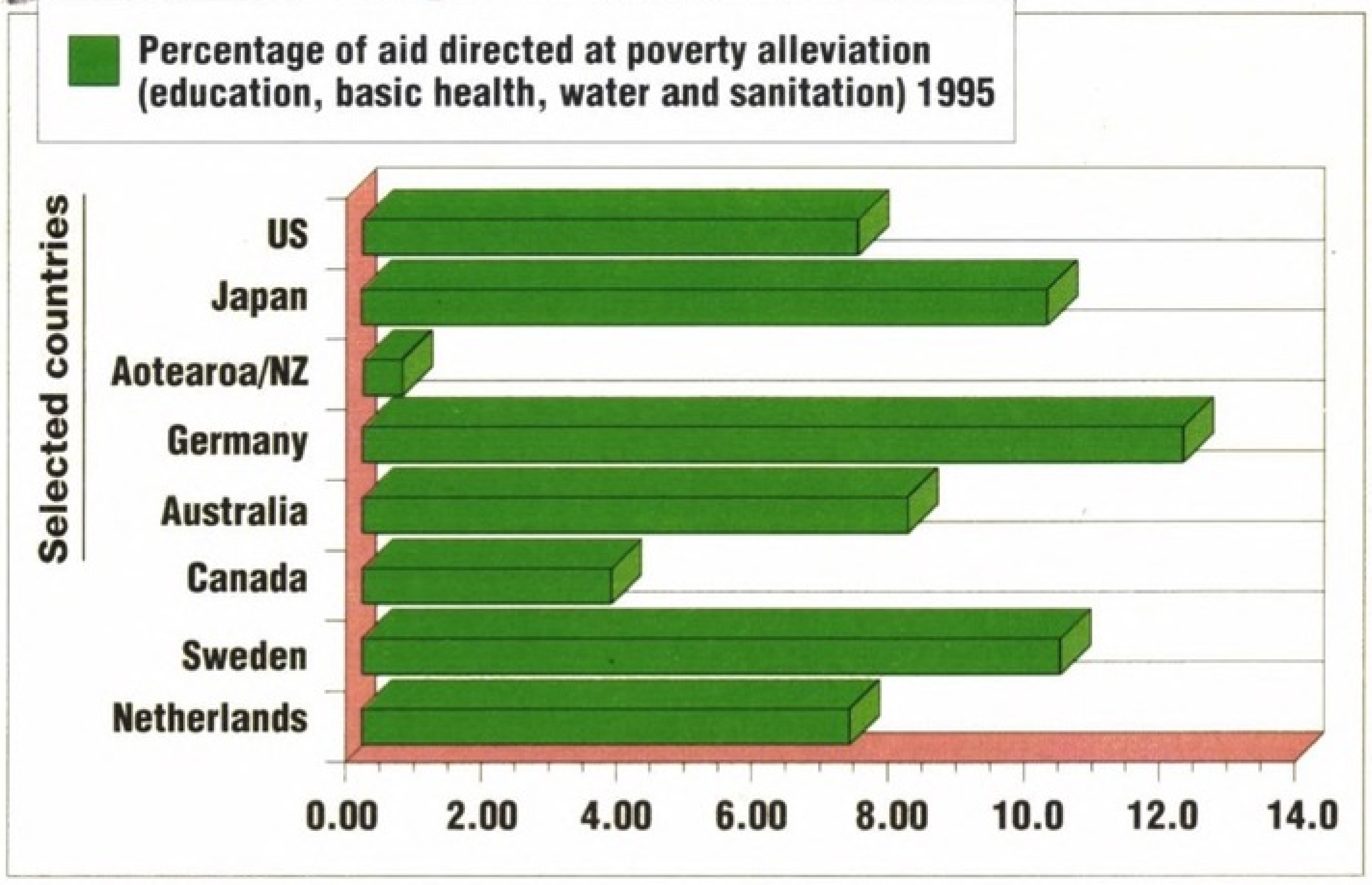


DEXTER TIRANTI

AIDING THE POOR?[3]

The UN has set the target for overseas aid at 0.7% of a country's GNP. Only the Netherlands and Sweden currently meet this target and the US aid budget is the lowest of all. Overall, aid is 0.22% of GNP. If it had stayed at its 1992 level of 0.33%, it would today be $24 billion more than it is.

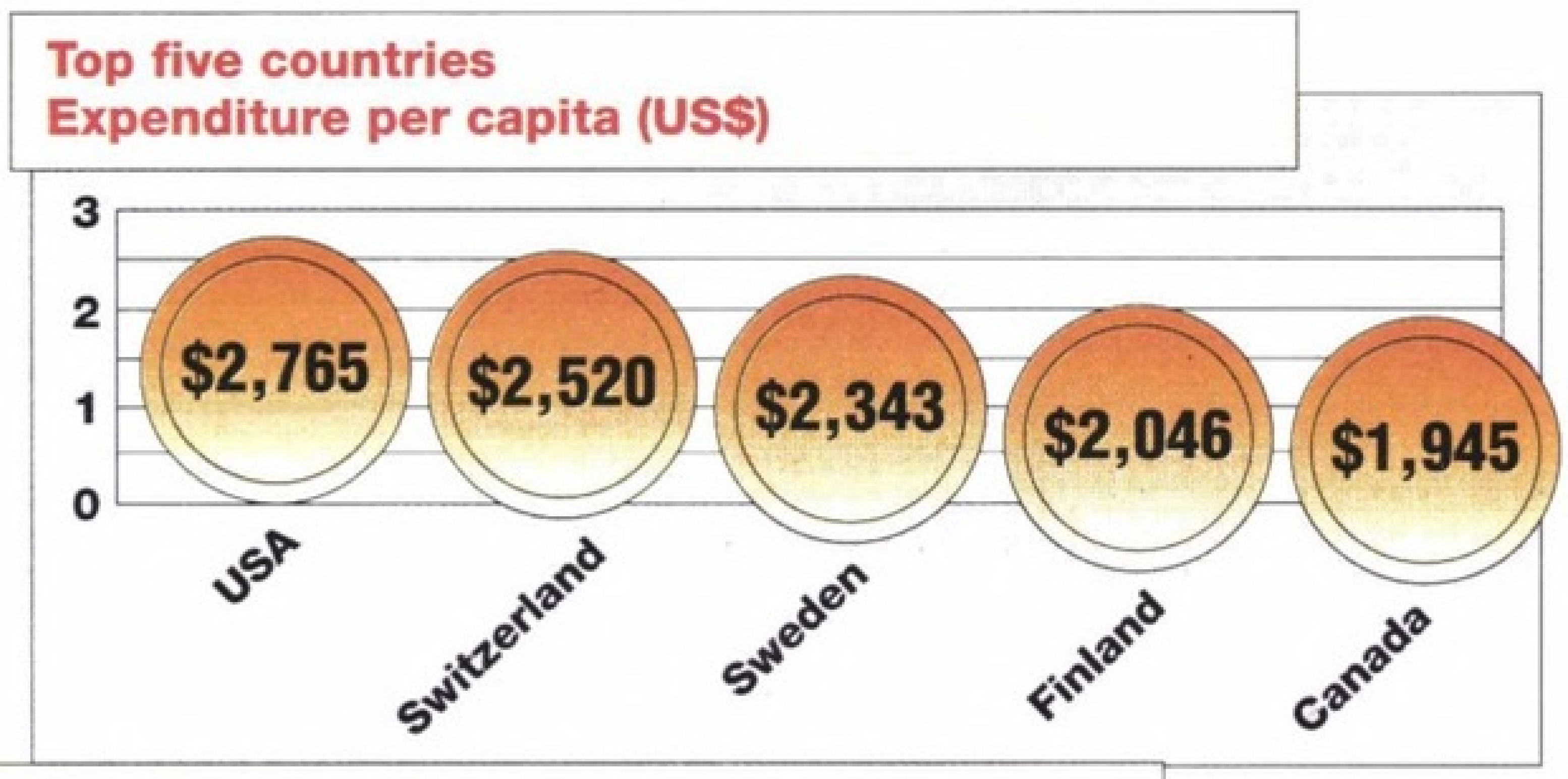
The majority of aid is not spent on direct poverty alleviation. Some is 'tied' to trade deals, or debt servicing. In 1997, debt-service payments from sub-Saharan Africa amounted to 80% of aid. Only 24.3% goes to the poorest countries.

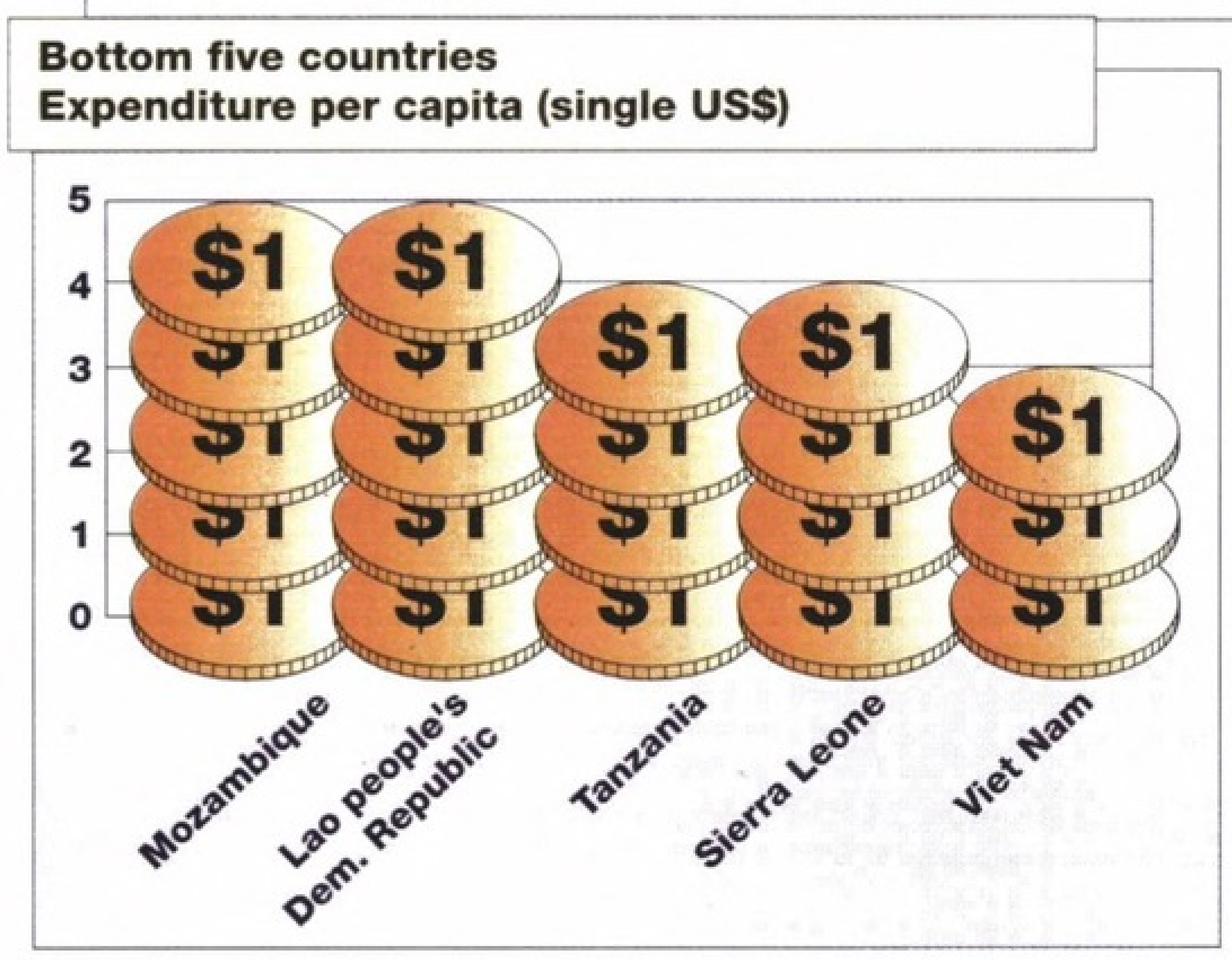


CONSUMING NEED, CONSUMING GREED

The 20% of the world's people who live in the highest-income countries consume 86% of the world's resources. The bottom 20% in the lowest-income countries consume less than 10%. The average protein consumption is 115 grams a day in France but only 32 grams in Mozambique. And the less money you have, the greater proportion you must spend on food rather than health or education.

Private and public health expenditure, 1990





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1 See http://www.foe.co.uk/progress for more details of the ISEW. 2 Peter Ohene Kyei, 'Field perspectives on decentralisation and rural poverty alleviation in Ghana', presented at the 1998 Development Studies Association, Bradford, Britain. 3 *The Reality of Aid 1998/99* (Earthscan). All other figures are from the 1998 Human Development Report (UNDP).

The burning of popular fear

The way we define the poor is a reflection of the kind of society we live in, argues **Zygmunt Bauman**.

'The poor will always be with us'; so insists popular wisdom, and there is no shortage of historical evidence to confirm this verdict. No society we know of was ever free of a category of people who were seen by the rest as incapable, for whatever reason, of eking out a living by their own efforts; incapable of living as the rest do. It is a social decision to classify people in such a way. Since it has little to do with who those people really are, or even what they do, the expectation that the 'poor will always be with us' can hardly be faulted. Each society constitutes and perpetuates itself through setting and prompting certain standards it expects every member to follow, and those standards can only be made visible if some people are seen to fail to meet them. Such people can then be declared a 'problem' which the rest of society must and should cope with.

The poor of different times and places differ between themselves in virtually every aspect of their condition, just like the societies of which they are part. Who is cast in this way depends not on the way the poor live, but on the way society as a whole lives. It is the standards reached and promoted by a given society which define the 'threshold' of poverty, the 'breadline', the point at which the human condition becomes a matter of concern for others, warning lights are lit and the urge to 'do something', to help, to censure, or both – prompts people to act or to reproach themselves if they do not. The treatment reserved for the poor, the way in which pity and condemnation are mixed, help and fault-finding are balanced, is a matter for society at large rather than for the poor themselves; a reflection of the standards a given community holds dear and is bent on cultivating.

Flawed consumers

Societies in most parts of the world are today driven by the market; the standards are those of wealth and consumption.

By no stretch of the imagination are the poor leading the way out of recession or contributing to the 'supply-clearing'

Fire in the heart: homeless people in New York are evicted as their tents are burned to the ground.

DONNA BINDER / FORMAT

demand. If anything, they make a profitable economy all the more difficult to achieve. The kind of goods that would be a priority if people were allowed to choose freely (bread, basic healthcare, schooling, low-rent housing) bring little or no profit to their manufacturers. The better-off consumers who would be enticed to buy the 'right type' (that is, profitable) of commodities are less likely to do so as long as they feel they have less money in their pockets because of the need to share their income with those they see as poor. A dollar in the taxpayer's pocket makes much more economic sense than the same dollar in the pauper's pocket: the chances are that the former will be put to more 'sensible' economic use. Economically speaking, the poor can now be seen, purely and simply, as flawed consumers.

And so one option for the poor is to 'declassify' them – exactly what the American 'welfare to workfare' or the 'welfare to work' scheme in Britain are attempting to do. Few people hope that the programmes, even if successful, would feather poor people's nests or even make their life more tolerable; meagre and insecure wages in an erratic labour market are a poor substitute for regular and guaranteed welfare provisions. The move would cross the poor out of the social register, would make them 'disappear' from the public agenda as objects of care and moral duty, and therefore cease to be 'poor' in the eyes of the public.

北京
熱烈庆祝'97北京商业

Consuming China – petrol consumption in East Asia has increased six-fold since 1950 but is only 20 per cent of levels in the West.

The problem, though, is that the move is not likely to succeed, since new workplaces are hard to come by and even when available tend to be fickle and unreliable. More important still, the move may at best un-make the 'problem of poverty' as a matter of public concern, but it would not make poverty vanish.

A secular hell

In this kind of contradictory situation the best strategy is to blame the victim. Because the poor are not seen to contribute either to production or consumption, they are described not as deprived but as depraved. They stand accused of flaunting the values by which 'decent' people live, while claiming their rights to the benefits which arise from pursuing the values they neglect: a sin evidently ugly and likely to find its way to many a consumer's and taxpayer's ears. The way the poor live (have chosen to live, as their accusers insist) is painted in lurid colours, as the hotbed of moral laxity (neglect of parental duties, loose marital ties, sexual abuse), dishonesty (welfare sponging and fraud), vice (drug addiction, alcoholism) and downright criminality (youth hooliganism, car stealing, mugging). The complex reality which lies behind such a picture of the poor in our extravagantly consumerist society is quite separate from the major effect of painting it this way: namely, shifting the people living below the poverty line from the realm of moral responsibility to that of law and order. Shifts of this kind justify transferring a part of the funds allocated to the poor from welfare provision to subsidizing employers, and another part to employing more police and building more prisons.

So the poor are written off, neither producers nor consumers. But in their new socially inspired avatar they still have an important role to play.

Once upon a time people were induced meekly to endure their lot, however harsh it might have been, by being shown vividly painted pictures of hell ready to devour anyone guilty of rebellion. Like all things other-worldly and eternal, the nether-world designed to achieve a similar effect in our modern times has been brought to earth, placed within the confines of earthly life and presented in a form ready for instant consumption. The poor are today the collective 'other' of the frightened consumers; where they live is today's own secular hell.

The lesson one learns when hearing about the poor is that certainty is more to be feared than the detested uncertainty, and that the punishment for rebellion against the discomforts of daily uncertainty is swift and merciless.

The sight of the poor (or at least the portrayal of poverty, for the poor themselves are increasingly swept out of sight, to the periphery of cities, to ghettos and estates) keeps the non-poor at bay and in step. It thereby perpetuates their life of uncertainty. It prompts them to tolerate or bear placidly the unstoppable 'flexibilization' of the world and the growing precariousness of their condition. The sight incarcerates their imagination and handcuffs their will. They do not dare to imagine a different world; they are much too chary to try and change the one they have.

Day by day the portrayal of the world's poor does its silent work in undermining confidence in all those with a regular income

This is a good enough reason for the political economy of uncertainty to include, as one of its indispensable ingredients, the casting of the 'problem of the poor' as alternatively, the issue of law and order or the object of humanitarian concern – but nothing less and no more than that.

When the first representation is used, the popular condemnation of the poor comes as close as conceivable to the burning of popular fears in effigy. When the second representation is deployed, the wrath against the cruelty and callousness of the vagaries of fate can be safely channelled into innocuous carnivals of charity, and the shame of impassivity can be disposed of in short-lived explosions of human solidarity.

Day by day, the portrayal of the world's poor does its silent work in undermining confidence and resolution in all those still working and with a regular income. The link between the poverty of the poor and the surrender of the non-poor has nothing irrational about it. The sight of the destitute is a timely reminder to all sober and sensible

CARL DE KEYZER / MAGNUM

IAN BERRY / MAGNUM

On the doorstep of the rich: poverty and wealth in South Africa sleep side-by-side.

beings that even the prosperous life is insecure, and that today's success is not a guarantee against tomorrow's fall. There is a well-founded feeling that the world is increasingly overcrowded; that the sole choice open to government is, at best, one between widespread poverty with high-unemployment, as in most of Europe and Australia, and widespread poverty with a little less unemployment, as in the US. This time round unemployment looks more sinister than ever before. It does not seem a product of a cyclical 'economic depression'; no more a temporary condensation of misery, to be dissipated and wiped out by the next economic boom.

> *It is buying and consuming more, not producing more, that is seen as the source of wealth and prosperity*

The politics of insecurity

The shrinking volume of employment is not, though, the sole reason to feel insecure. Such jobs as can still be had are no longer fortified against the unpredictable hazards of the future: work is today a daily rehearsal of redundancy. The political economy of insecurity saw to it that the orthodox defences have been dismantled and its defenders outlawed. Labour has become 'flexible', which in unadorned speech means that it is easy now for employers to fire employees at will and without compensation and that solidarity and effective trade-union action in defence of the wrongly dismissed looks increasingly like a pipe-dream. 'Flexibility' means a refusal of security; the growing number of available jobs are part-time or fixed-term, most contracts are 'rolling' or 'renewable' with frequency high enough to prevent the right to relative stability from acquiring force. 'Flexibility' also means that the old life-strategy of investing time and effort in specialist skills in the hope of a steady inflow of interest makes ever less sense – and so the once most common rational choice of people wishing for a life of security is no longer available.

This is a new kind of unemployment. For the better part of this century, just as for the duration of the last one, poverty – at least in the so-called affluent world – was identified mainly with not having a job. 'The poor' were people who for one reason or another could not draw their livelihood from selling their labour; an activity which was considered, the 'norm', at least for every adult male in a society of producers. Labour was seen as the prime source of a nation's wealth. To have a claim to a part of that wealth one had first to contribute to its creation. The unemployed were therefore considered abnormal, and the presence of unemployment was a threat to society's standards. To meet that threat, one had to try to 'get people back to work'; to the condition considered obligatory for all. By the same token the poor were a 'reserve army of labour': today, temporarily, not in the ranks, but tomorrow or the day after bound to be called once more into active service.

This being so, keeping such reservists in good condition – properly fed, clad and shod – was not just in their interests, but in everybody's. Yes, it would be morally repulsive were the poor to suffer hunger, cold or homelessness while unemployed and unable to pay their own way: but no, helping them out of their misery was not just a matter of pity, compassion and moral conscience – it was also a matter of good housekeeping. Healthcare, schooling and decent housing for the poor; keeping people above the poverty line was, economically speaking, a good investment. All expenditures would be repaid with profits once labour, now redundant, was called back to the market. Through thick and thin, through lean years as much as fat, labour had to remain, at least potentially, a commodity – just the thing that prospective buyers would be keen to purchase when they needed it once more.

Welfare state

When victorious countries after the Second World War introduced the idea of a welfare state which would provide everyone with state guarantees of secure livelihood and decent life conditions, there was almost complete consensus among Left and Right that its implementation was both necessary and desirable. No-one at that time argued that however nice the idea looked 'we couldn't afford it'. It did not occur to any party to set the 'interests of the taxpayer' and the needs of the poor against each other and to imply that they were in conflict. On the contrary, there was common agreement that the rich and the poor were equally interested in the welfare state working well, and that all would eventually benefit from its work.

The snag is, though, that to all practical intents and purposes the poor have ceased to be this 'reserve army'. Today, there is no labour-greedy industry waiting for more people to be employed. Technological progress means fewer working places; good accounting means less money spent hiring labour; better productivity means slimming and 'downsizing'; good management means selling or phasing out the branches which do not bring enough profit. Nowadays, wealth grows through investment in high technology, scientific research and information, and higher employment may only impair its chances. Stock exchanges have been quick to note the difference; they react nervously to the news of any increase in employment or wage-funds, and lavishly reward the companies shedding labour. Thomas Labreque, director-general of Chase Manhattan Bank, was voted a salary of nine million dollars in recognition of his role in eliminating 10,000 jobs.

The truth is that from the point of view of commodity production, unemployed people are not just temporarily out of work; they are structurally redundant. Fewer and fewer people are needed to produce more and more commodities. It is easy to envisage unstoppable growth of productivity coupled with a steady fall in employment. In these circumstances, paying the upkeep of the poor is no longer an investment in future wealth, let alone a good investment; it does not make economic sense.

No, the major worry which troubles the producers of commodities these days is not how to find enough skilled labour to supply what the market would sell, but how to 'liquidize' the stocks; how to find or better still create enough demand to clear the existing supply.

Today, it is not producers but consumers – eager and willing consumers – who are in demand. Whenever we hear of an economic recession, we also invariably hear that the 'consumer-led recovery' – the will of consumers to buy more and to borrow more in order to buy more still – is the main way out of present trouble and the sole hope of getting the economy going smoothly. It is buying and consuming more, not producing more, that is seen far and wide as the source of wealth and prosperity.

And yet, as Karl Marx once said in the times of capitalism too young and self-confident to read the writing on the wall, the workers cannot liberate themselves without liberating the rest of society. We can say now, at the consumerist stage of capital's history, when the walls themselves have been kicked out of the way, that society cannot free itself from its paralyzing anxiety unless the poor are liberated from their misery.

Basic income for all

It was Thomas Paine, radical thinker and writer, who first advanced the idea of a 'basic income' independent of work done or sold. His idea was, typically, born well before its time: the next century was to entrench labour as a form of commodity which could be bought and sold. Not only was employment to become the sole legitimate entitlement to income, but work was to be identified with sellable activity and conditioned on the presence of buyers eager to pay for it; market demand was to be given the sole right to distinguish 'work' from 'non-work'. Another century was needed to expose the limitation and dire insufficiency of that arrangement and to reveal the threats to ethical standards, social solidarity and the tissue of human relations which it held in store.

Two centuries after Thomas Paine, the idea of detaching essential livelihood from employment has been broached time and again. First in France in the 1930s by Jacques Duboin; in Belgium by the Charles-Fourier circle in the 1980s and in recent years by the Greens in Germany, Holland and Spain, and in Ireland by no less an authority than the National Conference of Bishops. The most comprehensive and closely argued proposal to 'decouple' the right to basic income from employment has been put forward by the German political sociologist Claus Offe.

The decisive argument in favour of the unconditional social guarantee of basic livelihood can be found not in the moral duty towards the destitute, however redeeming for the ethical health of society the fulfilment of that duty undoubtedly is. Neither is it there in philosophical renditions of justice, however important these are to arouse and keep awake human consciences. Nor in benefits for the quality of life in common, however crucial these are for the general well-being and for the survival of human bonds. No, it lies in its importance for a truly autonomous, self-governing society; for restoring to all men and women their courage to exercise the role of citizen and for the daring and imagination needed to exercise it properly. Fully fledged citizenship and a society capable of choosing its way are conceivable solely in the company of self-confident people; secure people; people free from the existential fear of poverty. ■

Zygmunt Bauman is Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Leeds. His most recent book is *Work, consumerism and the new poor* (Open University Press 1998).

Edgardo's special place

CASA ALIANZA

Edgardo Rodriguez, 14 years old, was sleeping under a small stone statue in the Concordia Park in downtown Tegucigalpa when Hurricane Mitch struck Honduras on Sunday, 25 October 1998. Heavy rains and strong winds continued uninterrupted until the following Sunday. To date, almost 7,000 people are known to have been killed. Over 8,000 are missing and half a million are homeless. Almost two million Hondurans have been affected.

This is Edgardo's story:

'Here we are in the Concordia. This is where I was sleeping on the night of Mitch when the River Choluteca grew and entered the park. Now we're in the centre of the park where there are lots of people helping to reconstruct it.

'We're approaching a place which was very special for me, it was the garden for animals. Just past here is where I was on the night of the Hurricane. I was under this small stone statue sleeping when I felt the water and it woke me up. I ran out of the park, I went into the street where I found my friends. It was very dark and the water was up to my waist.

'In the street we met people trying to get out of a house, so me and my friends tried to help them. I was very afraid, but I was also very sad. I imagined that my park was going to be destroyed. On the night I felt very bad and I nearly died here: I thought maybe it was something that God had sent to make the people of Honduras think.

'On the night of the tragedy many currents came together in the streets of the area called Concordia, there were many people who were crying and who were asking for help. It was very difficult for me to believe that the park would survive, but today being here again, although it's covered in mud, thanks to God much of it still remains.'

Many children like Edgardo were out on the streets during the Hurricane and didn't sleep or eat for several days. Casa Alianza is in contact with almost a thousand different street kids in Tegucigalpa each year and while we can account for all of the children within our programmes, it remains to be seen how many of these children will have been hurt or killed.

Some children talk about their fears at that time and how they thought they were going to die. Now, when some of the younger ones hear thunder or it starts to rain they panic, believing another Mitch is on its way.

Perhaps they know that when it comes to natural as well as human-made disasters, it is almost always the poorest people who are first and worst hit.

Ann Birch works for Casa Alianza, the Latin American branch of the non-profit organization Covenant House, which is the largest not-for-profit childcare agency providing for homeless children and youth in the Americas.

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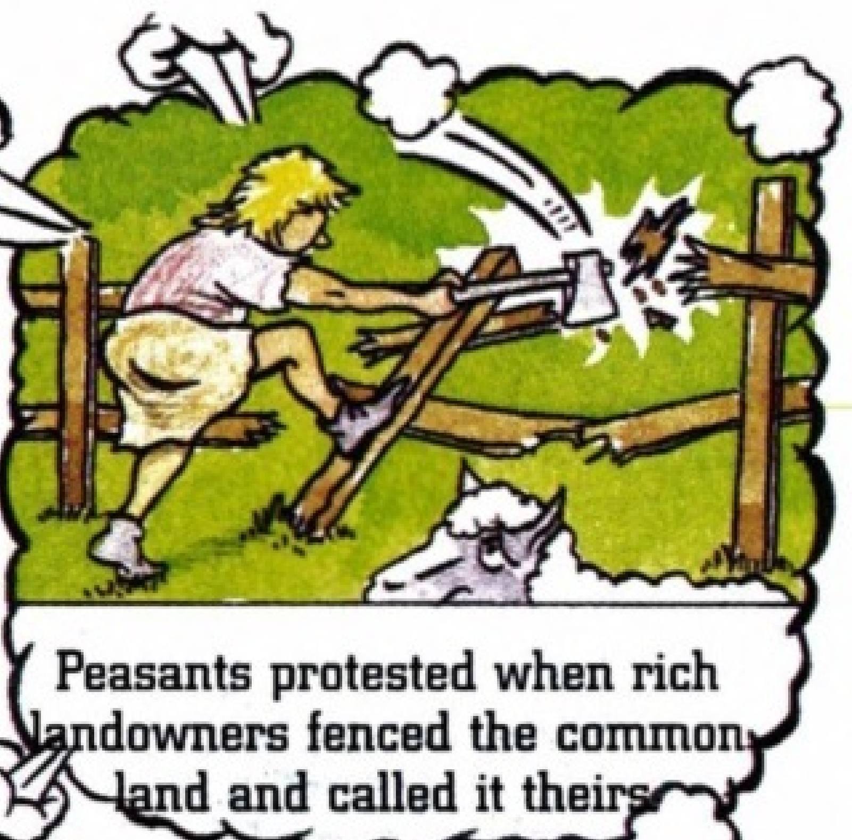
website: www.casa-alianza.org

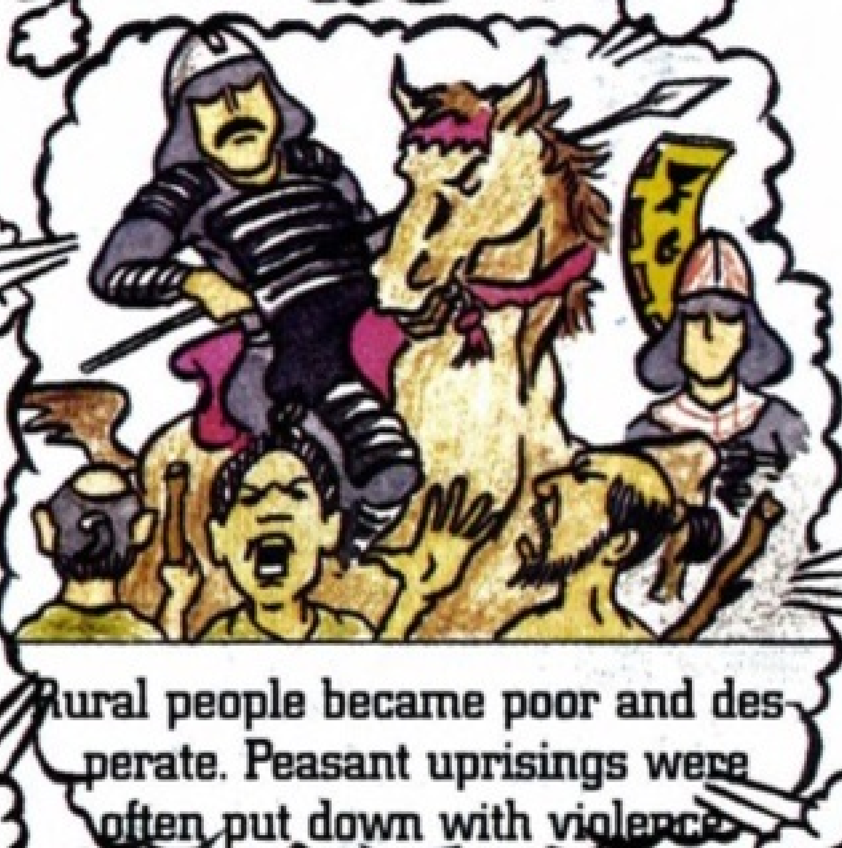
PAUPER'S PROGRESS?

A history of poverty

Colonialism brought wealth to western Europe by pauperizing the colonies.

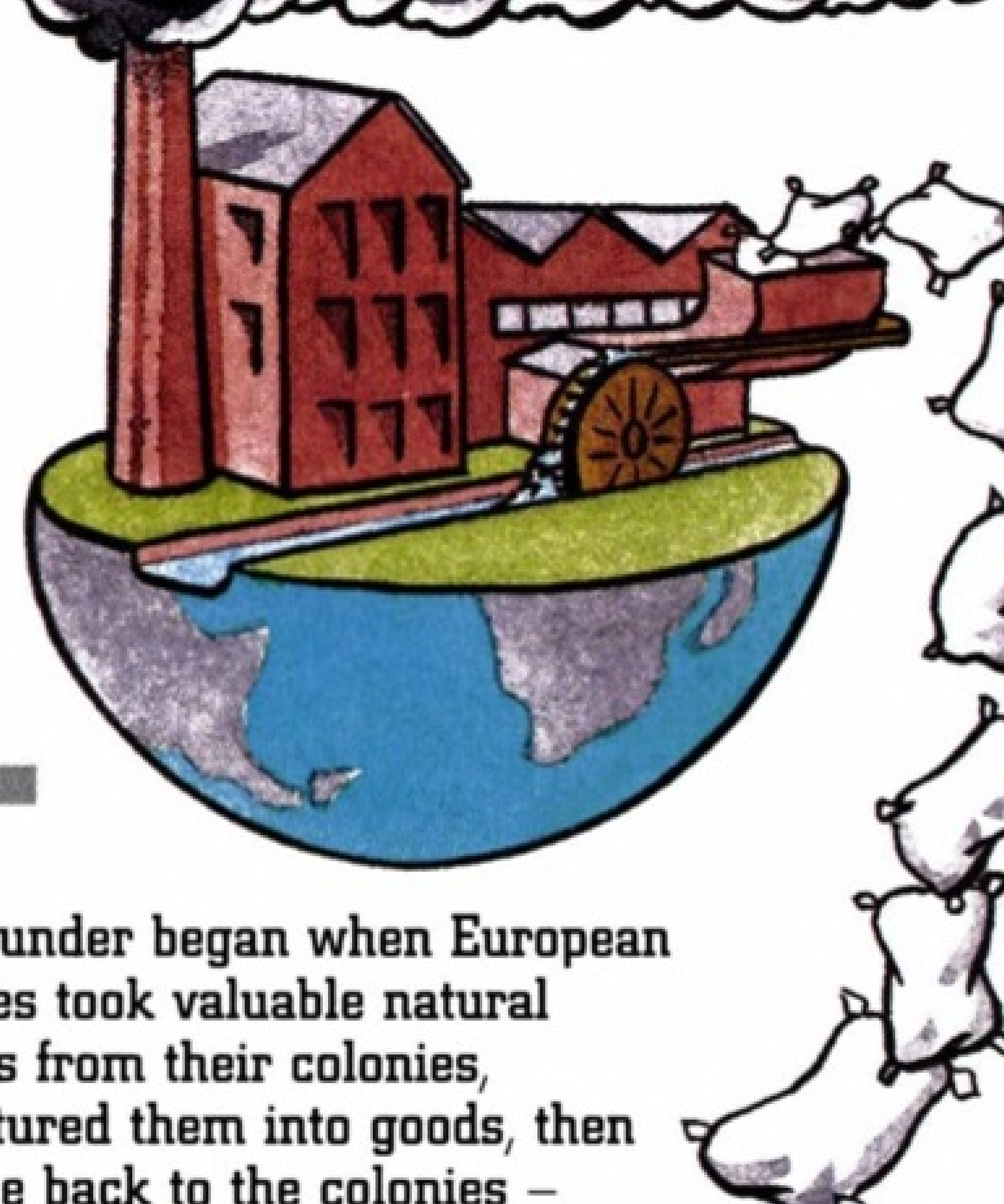


Peasants protested when rich landowners fenced the common land and called it theirs.

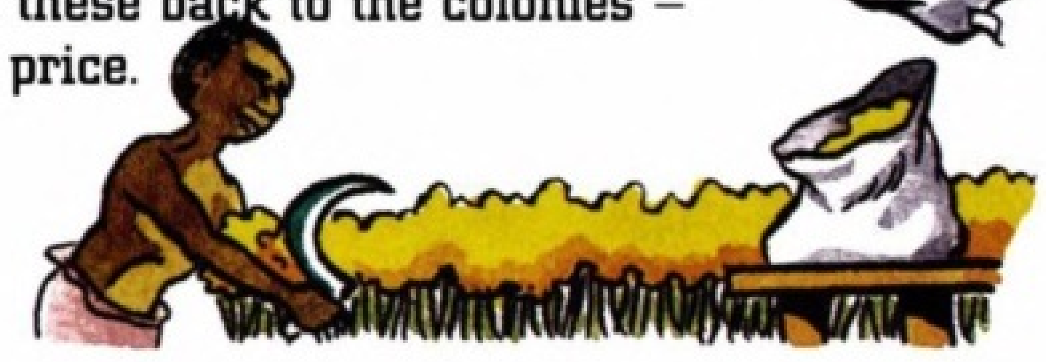


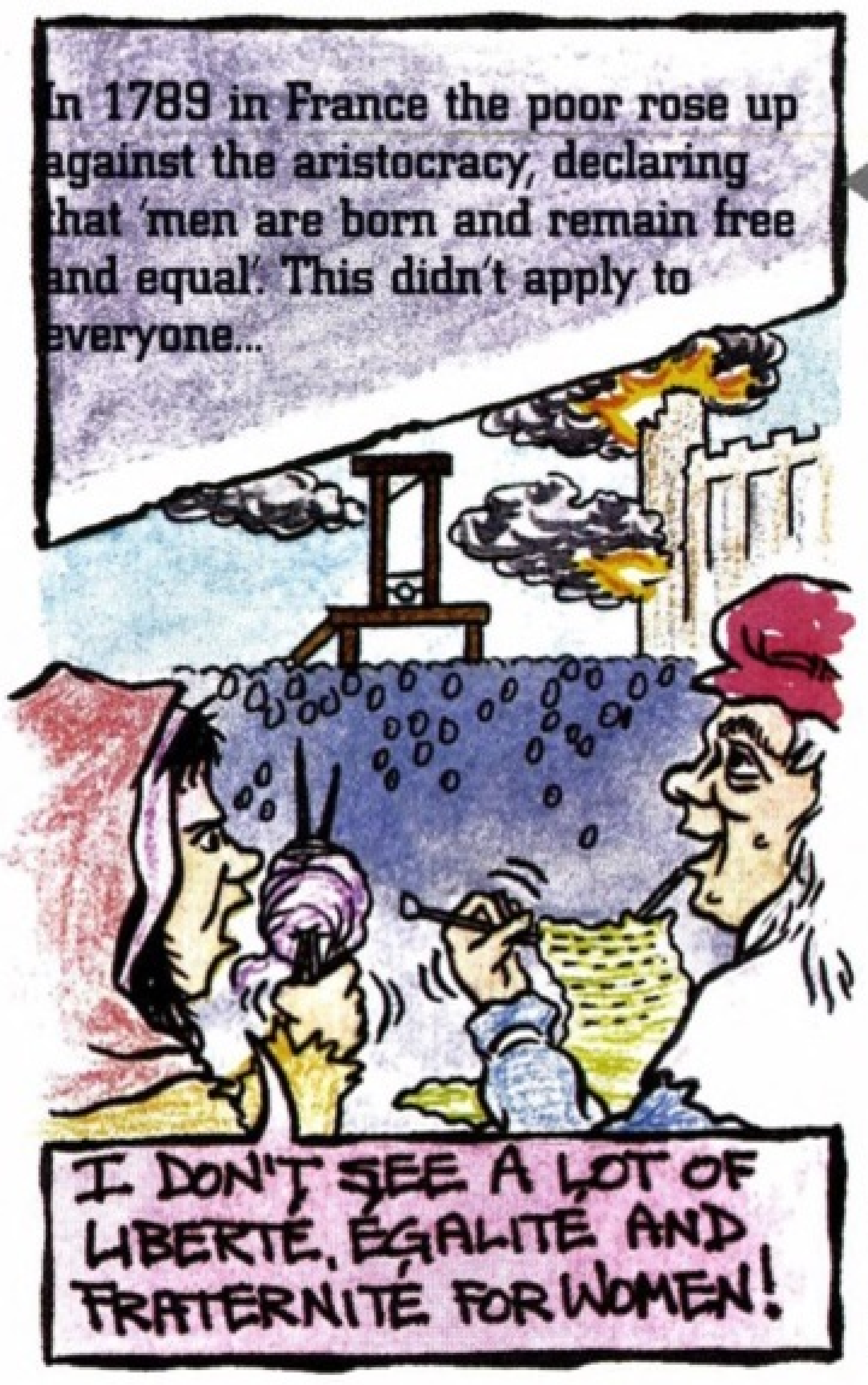
Rural people became poor and desperate. Peasant uprisings were often put down with violence.

With the Industrial Revolution, peasants moved into towns to find work in the new factories and became dependent on a wage. The urban poor were classified as 'deserving' (old, sick, disabled) and 'undeserving' (everyone else).



A new plunder began when European companies took valuable natural resources from their colonies, manufactured them into goods, then sold these back to the colonies – at a price.



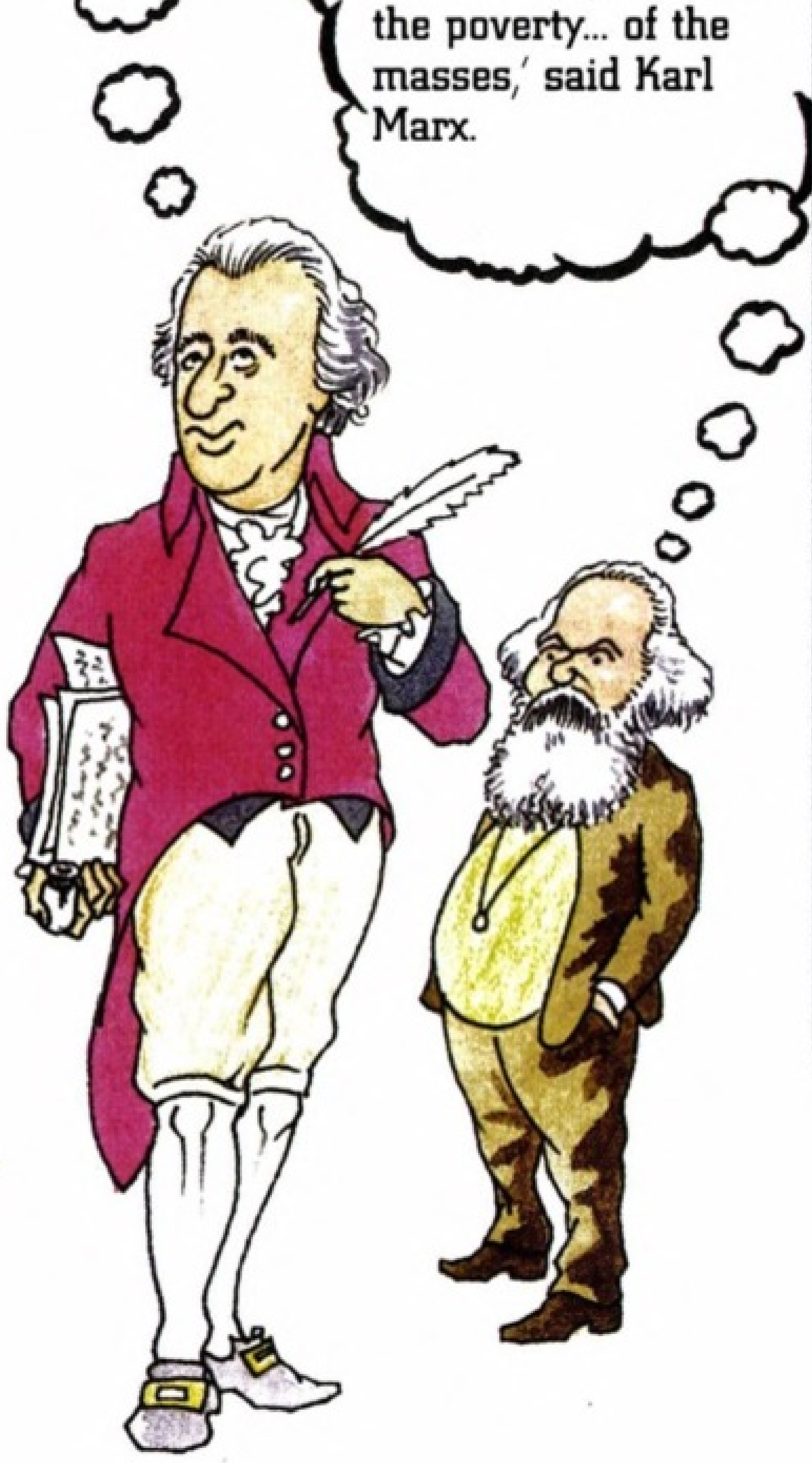


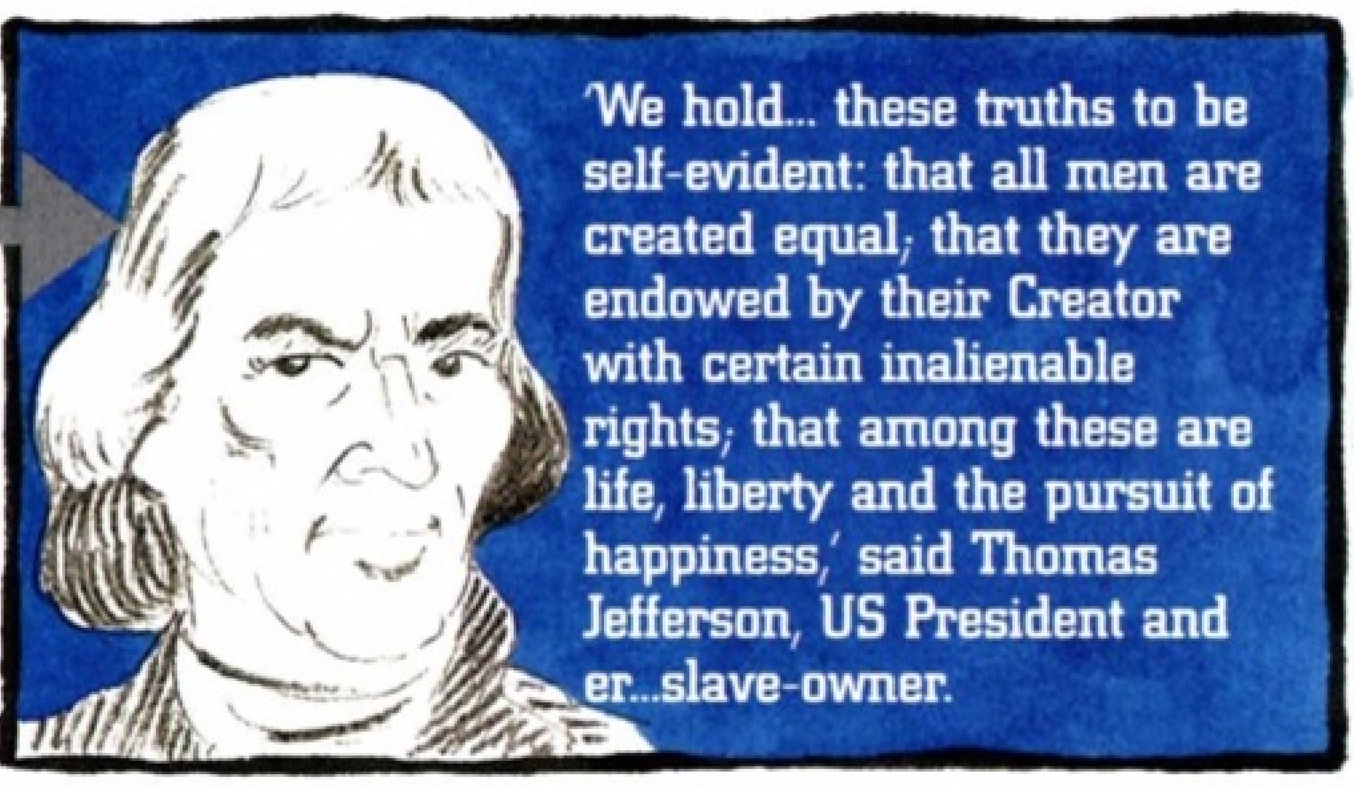
In 1789 in France the poor rose up against the aristocracy, declaring that 'men are born and remain free and equal'. This didn't apply to everyone...

I DON'T SEE A LOT OF LIBERTÉ, ÉGALITÉ AND FRATERNITÉ FOR WOMEN!

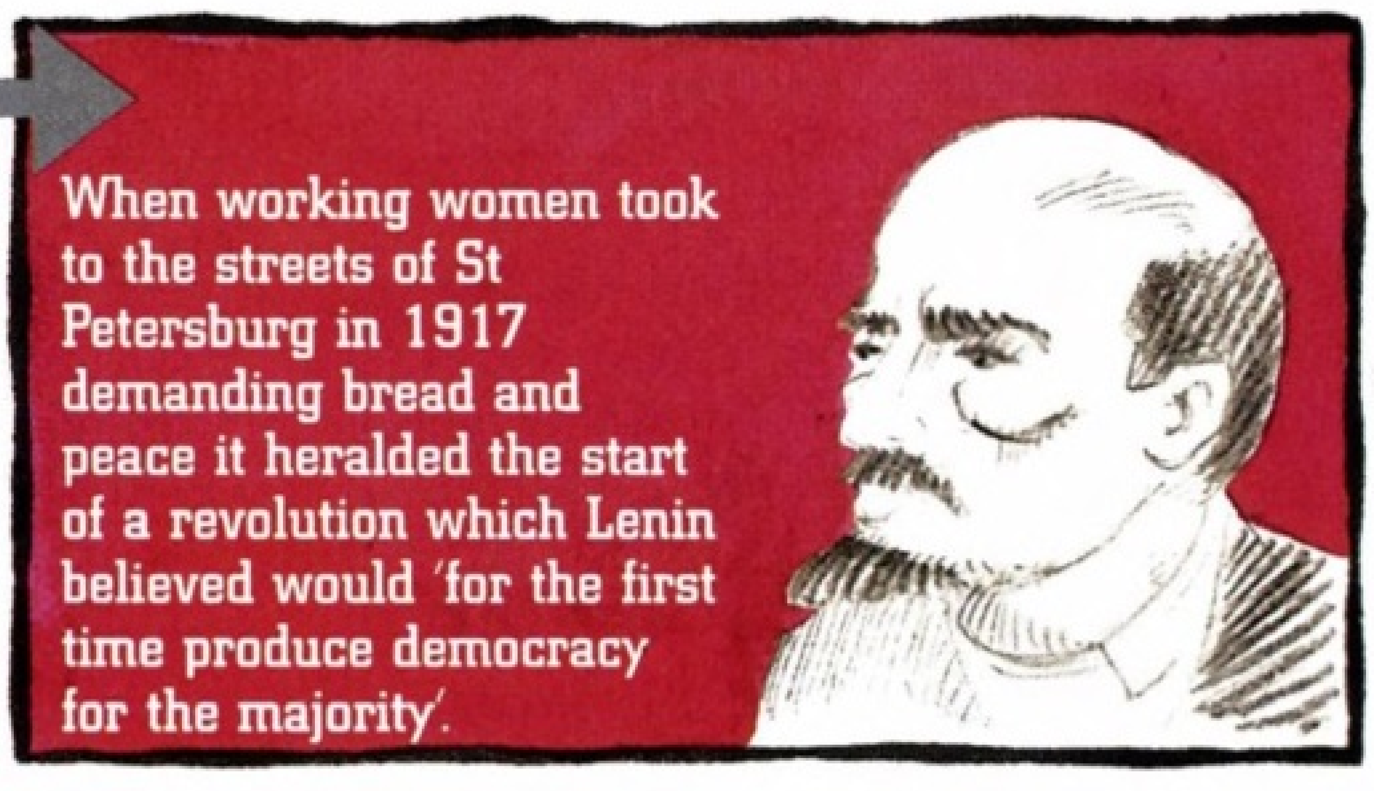
Radical thinker and writer Thomas Paine advocated the end of poverty and inequality as the only way to human happiness.

'The cause of all real crises always remains the poverty... of the masses,' said Karl Marx.

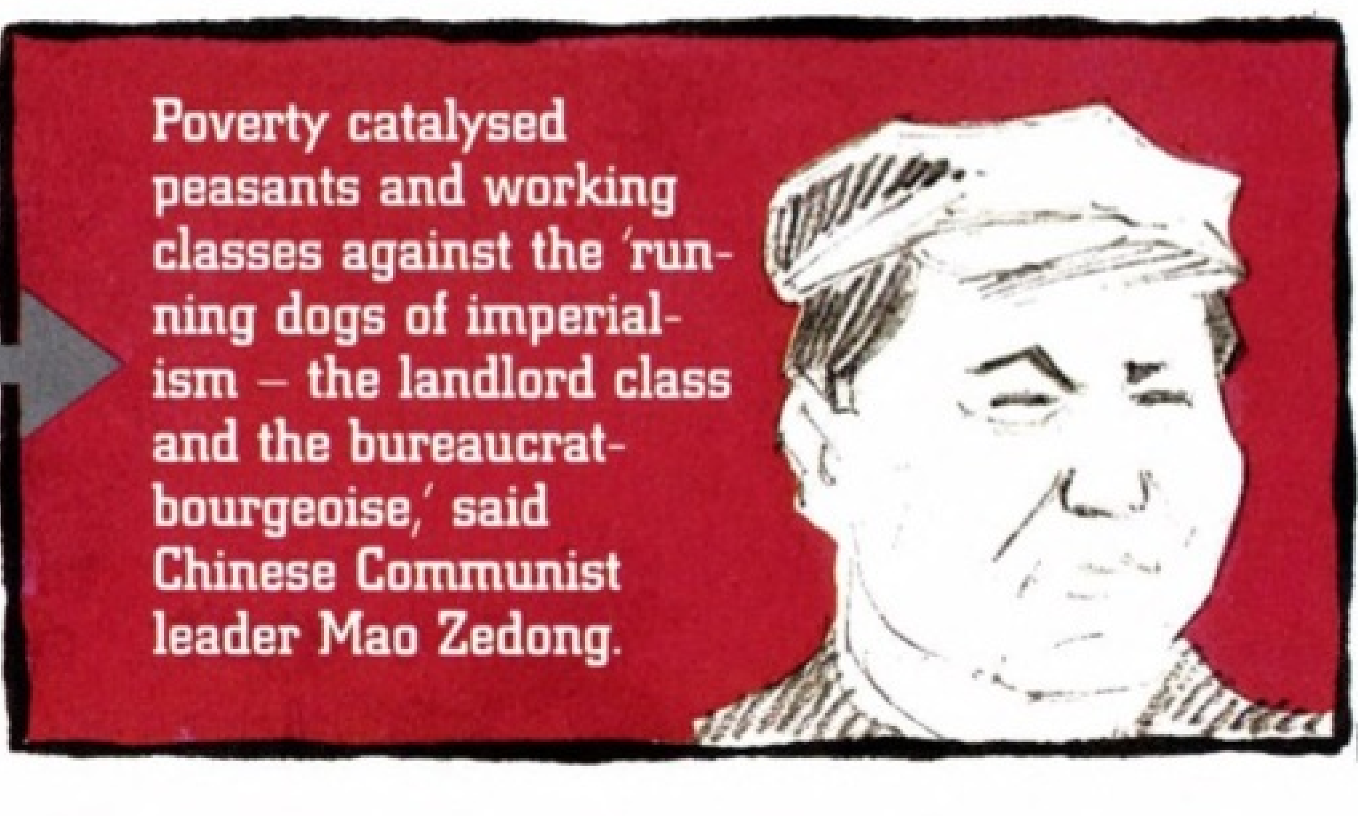




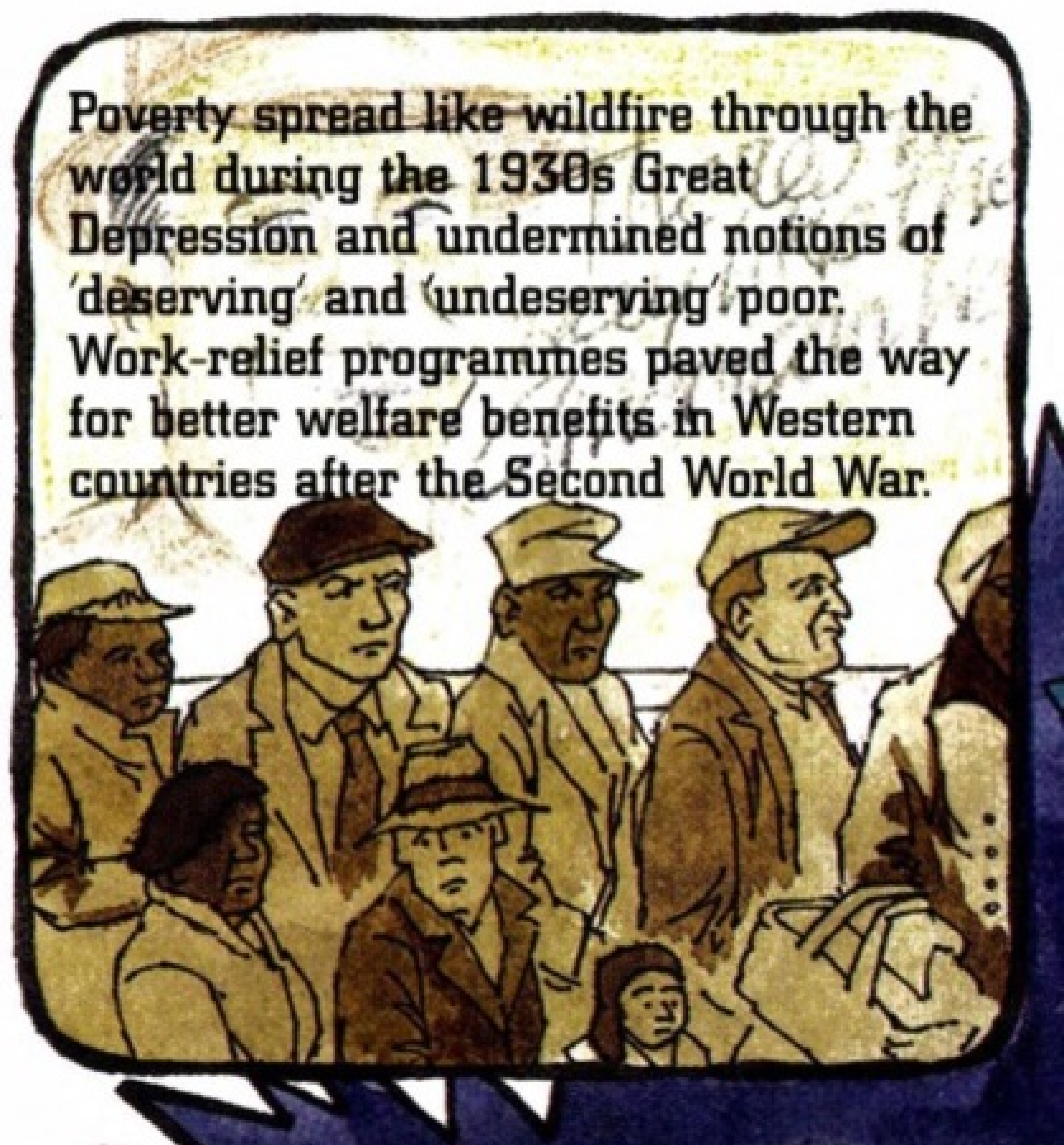
'We hold... these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,' said Thomas Jefferson, US President and er...slave-owner.



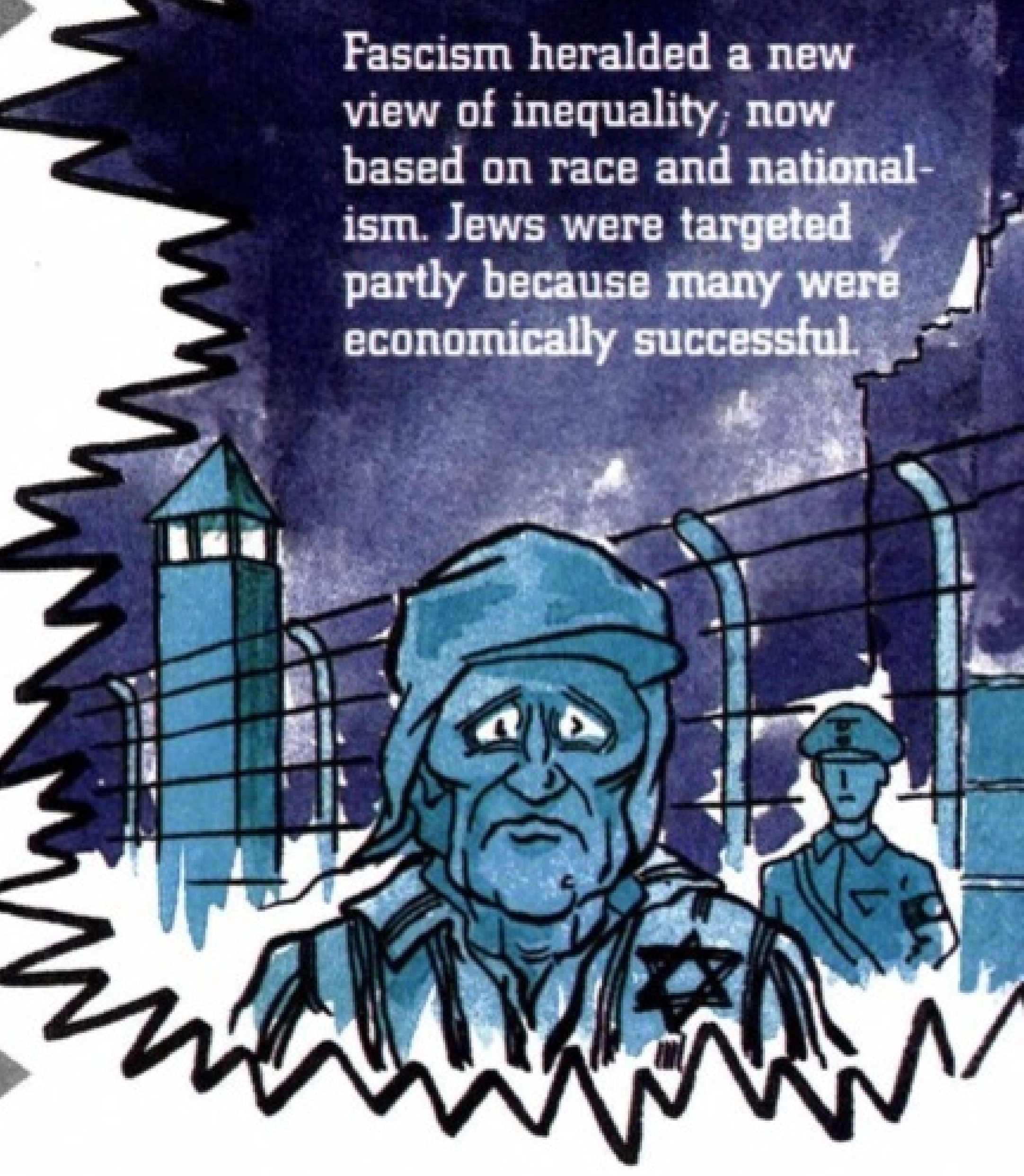
When working women took to the streets of St Petersburg in 1917 demanding bread and peace it heralded the start of a revolution which Lenin believed would 'for the first time produce democracy for the majority'.



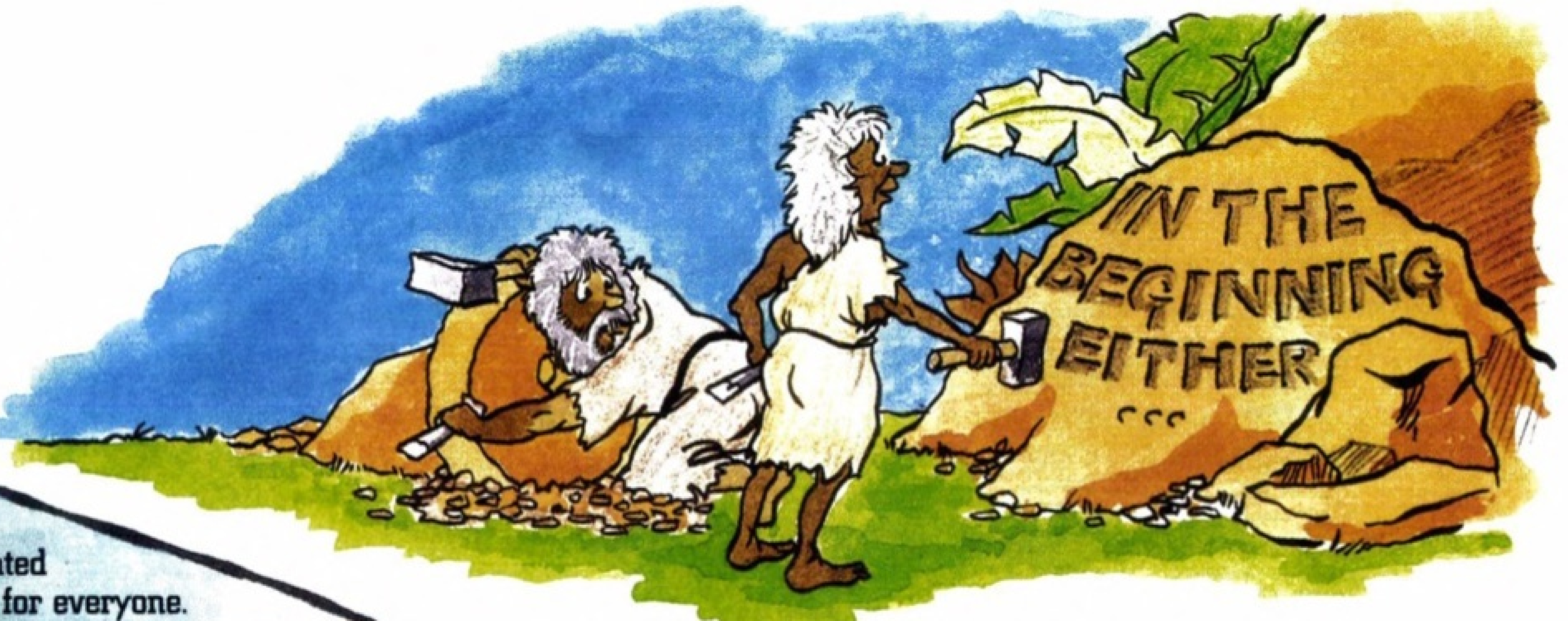
Poverty catalysed peasants and working classes against the 'running dogs of imperialism – the landlord class and the bureaucrat-bourgeoise,' said Chinese Communist leader Mao Zedong.



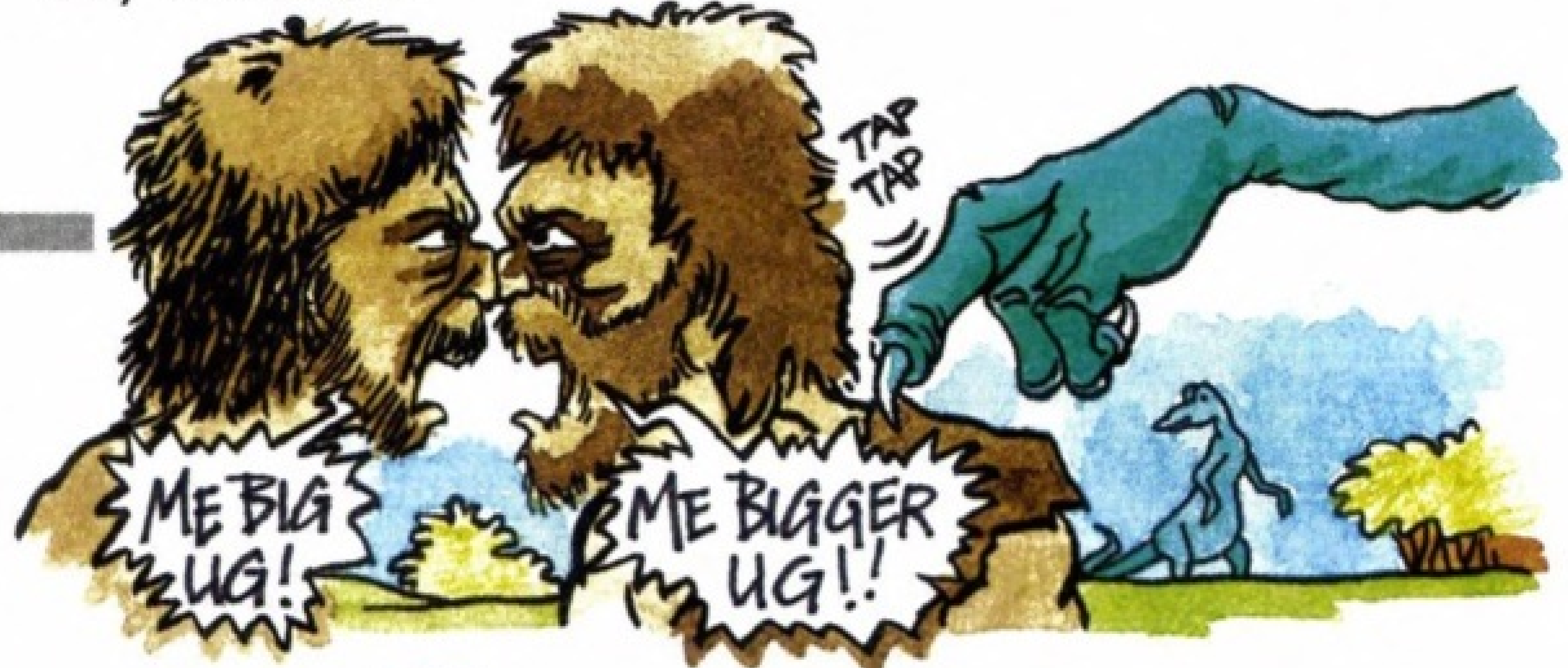
Poverty spread like wildfire through the world during the 1930s Great Depression and undermined notions of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. Work-relief programmes paved the way for better welfare benefits in Western countries after the Second World War.



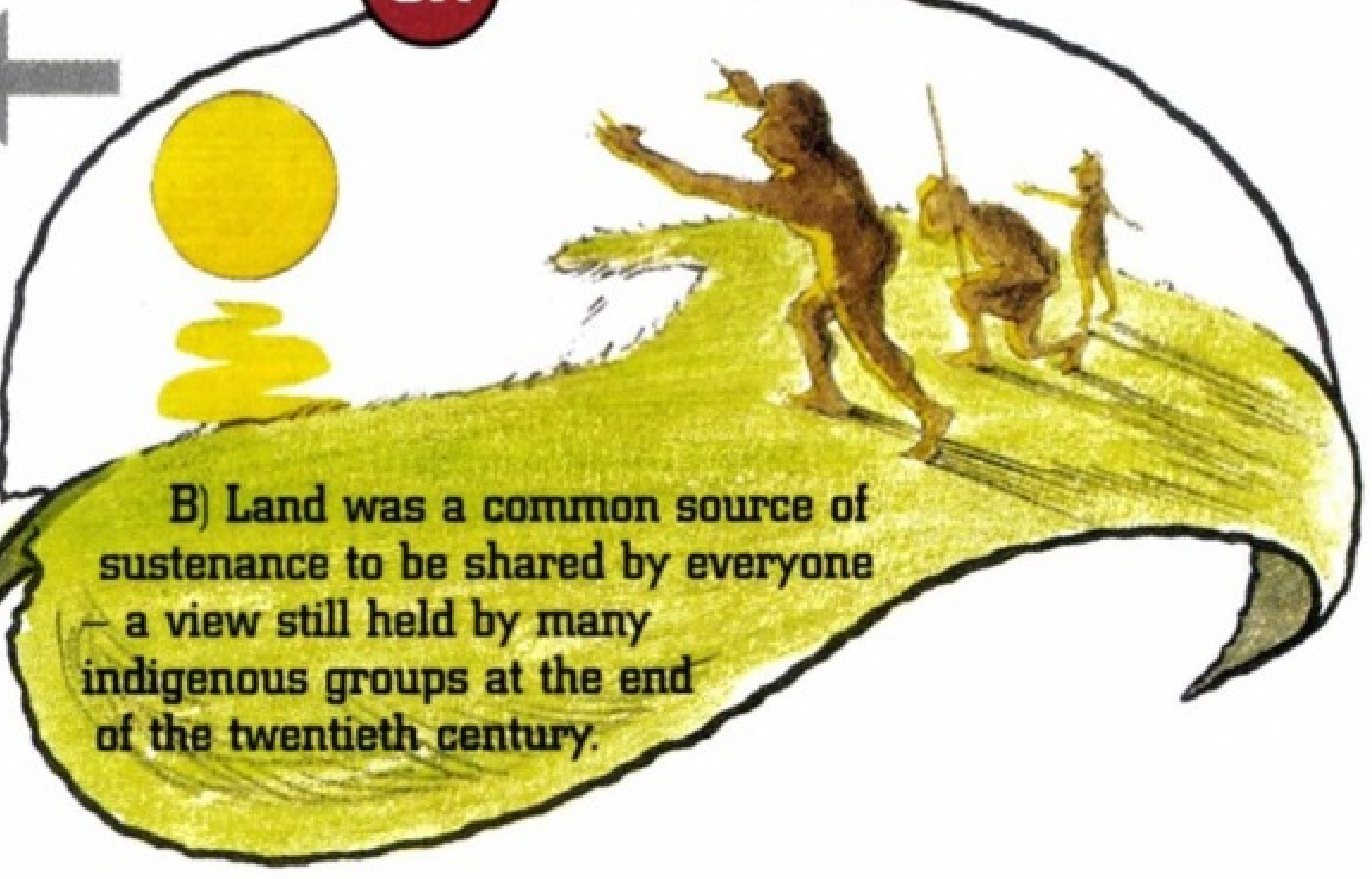
Fascism heralded a new view of inequality; now based on race and nationalism. Jews were targeted partly because many were economically successful.



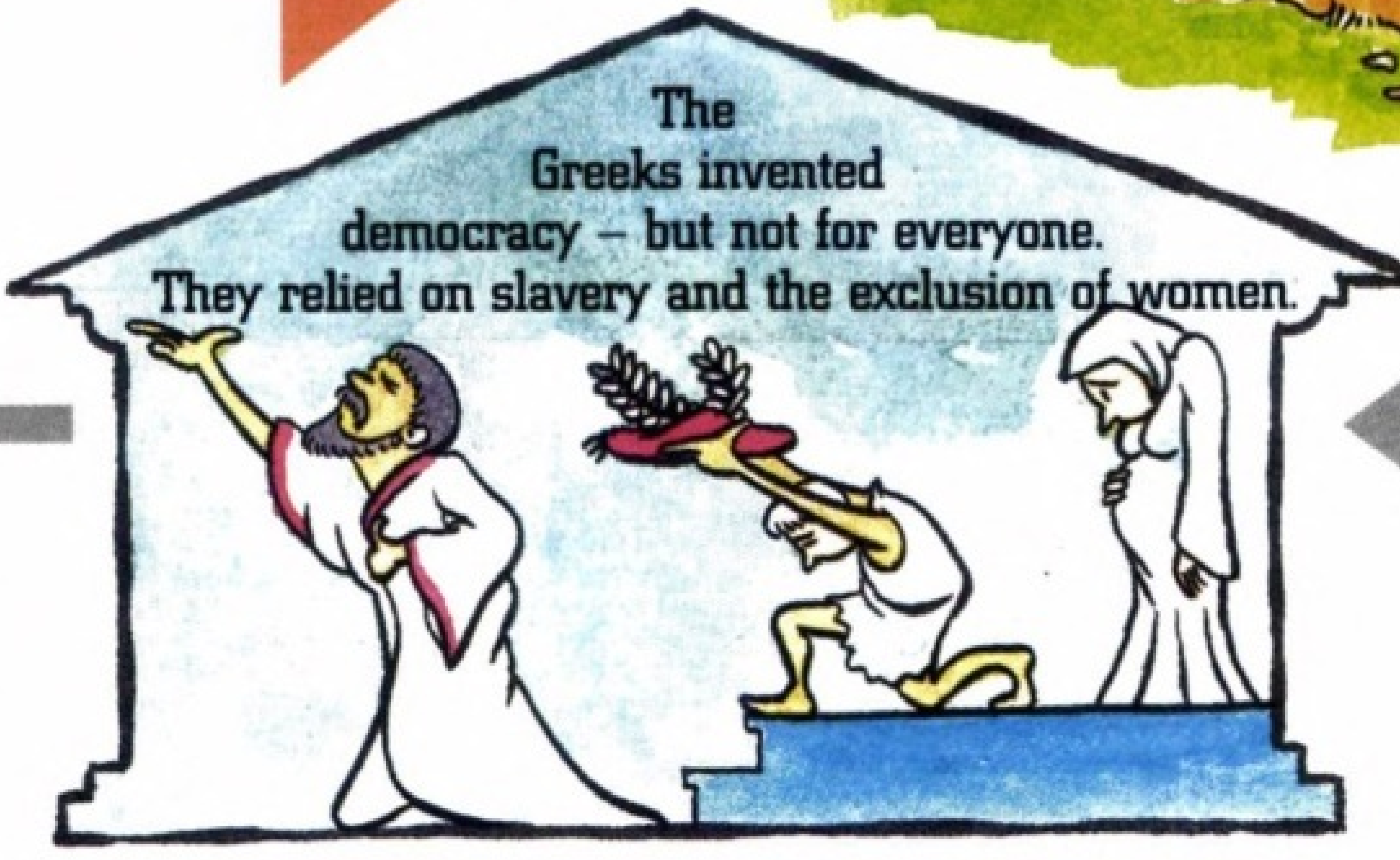
A) Survival of the fittest. People did not use money or accumulate wealth – they lived from day to day on what they could hunt.


ME BIG UG!
ME BIGGER UG!!
TAP TAP

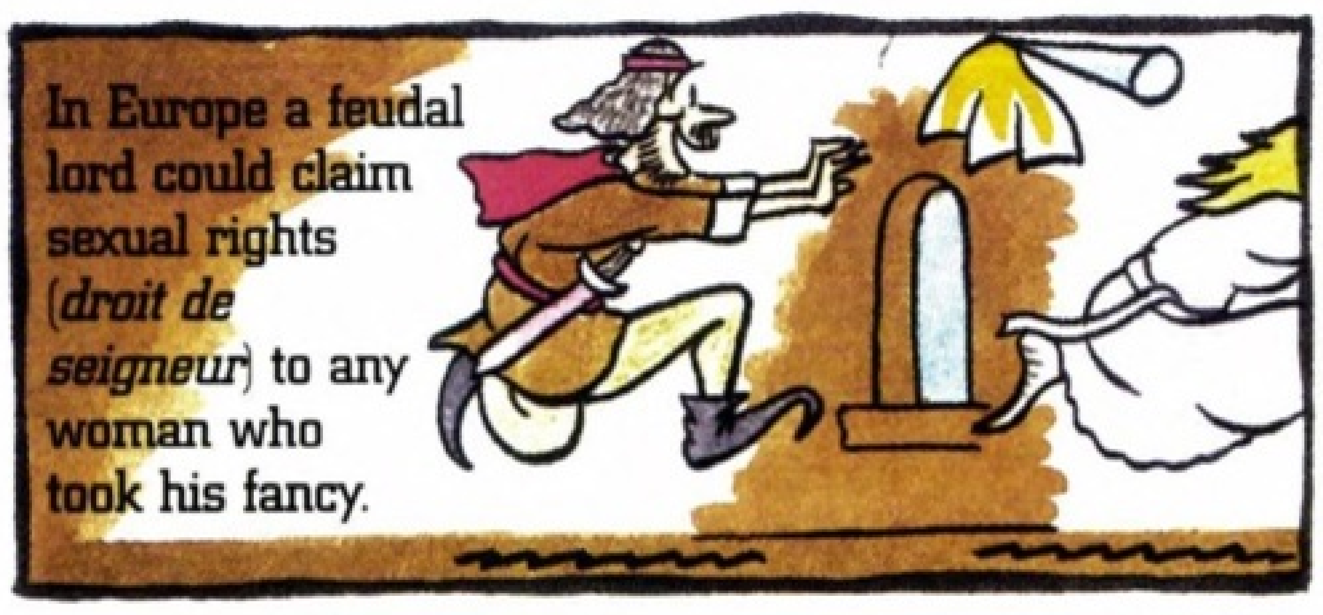
OR



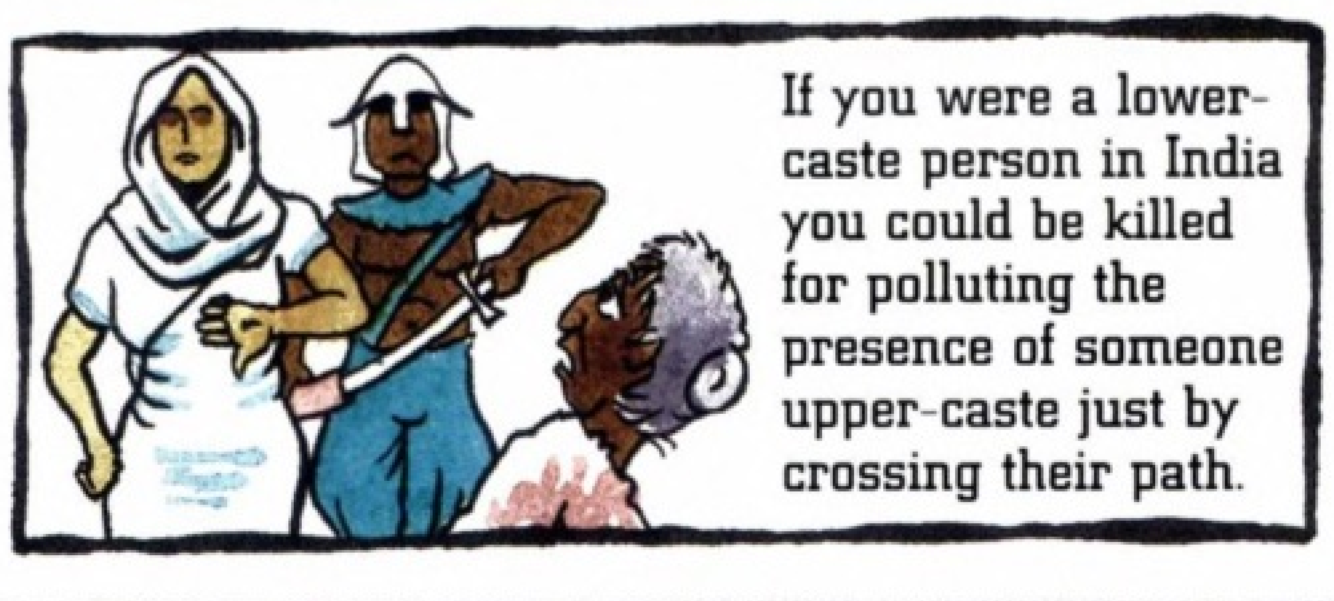
B) Land was a common source of sustenance to be shared by everyone – a view still held by many indigenous groups at the end of the twentieth century.



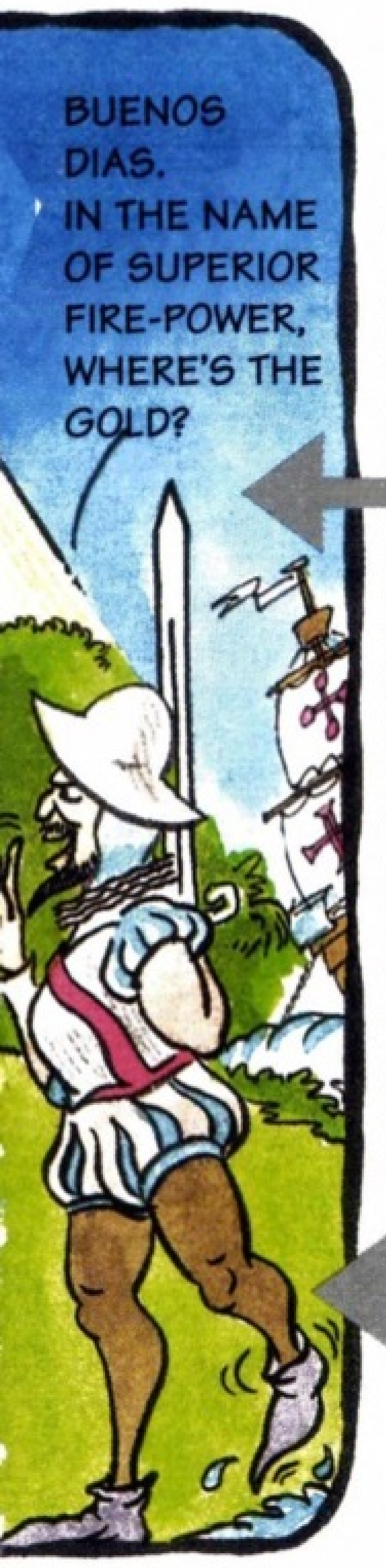
The Greeks invented democracy – but not for everyone. They relied on slavery and the exclusion of women.

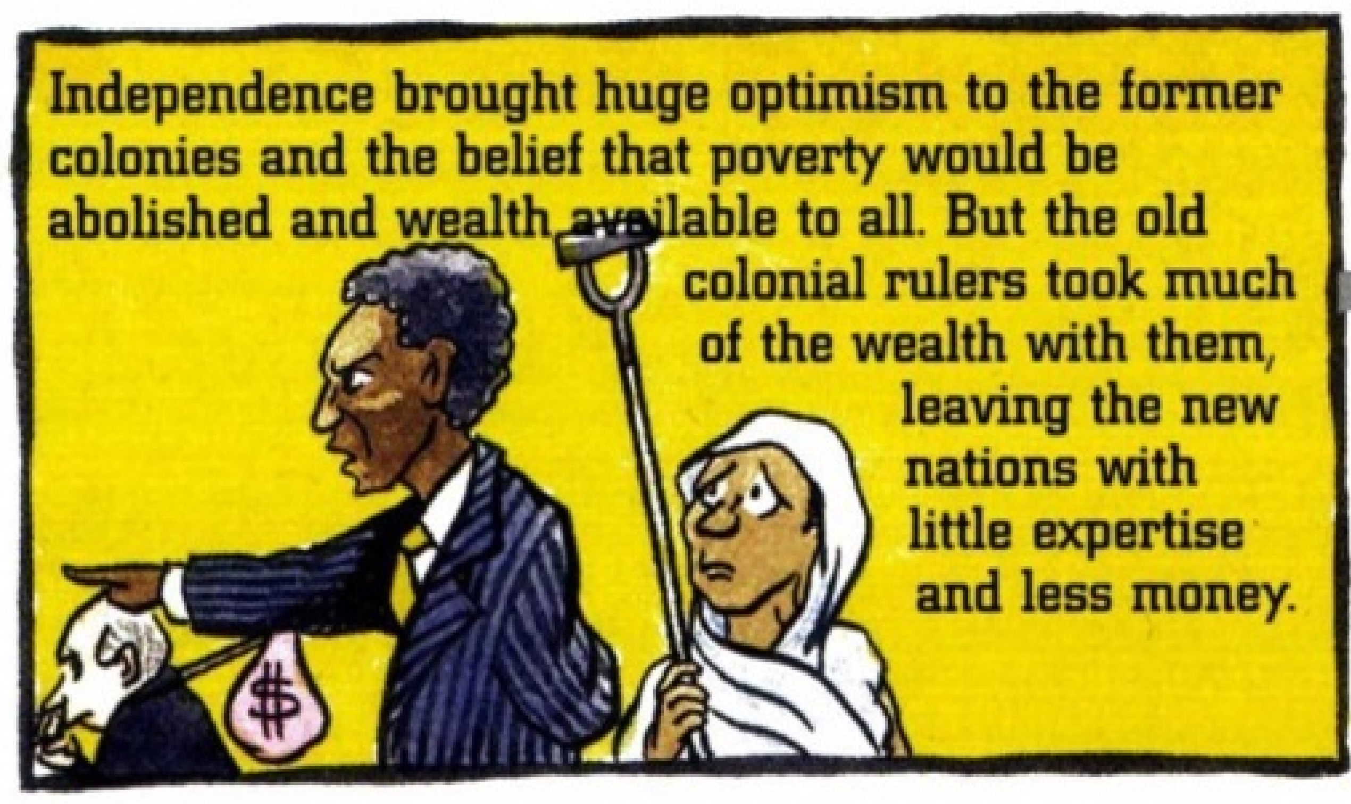


In Europe a feudal lord could claim sexual rights (*droit de seigneur*) to any woman who took his fancy.

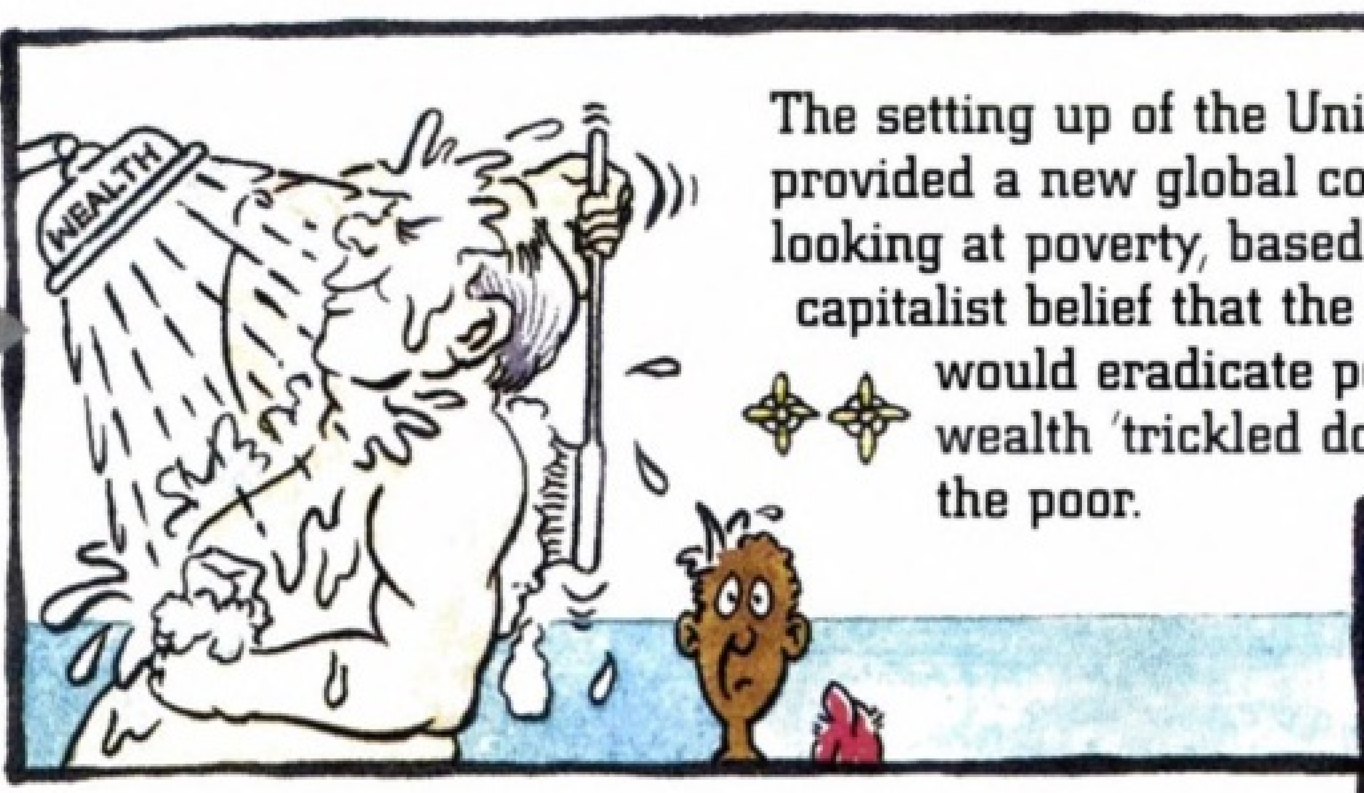


If you were a lower-caste person in India you could be killed for polluting the presence of someone upper-caste just by crossing their path.

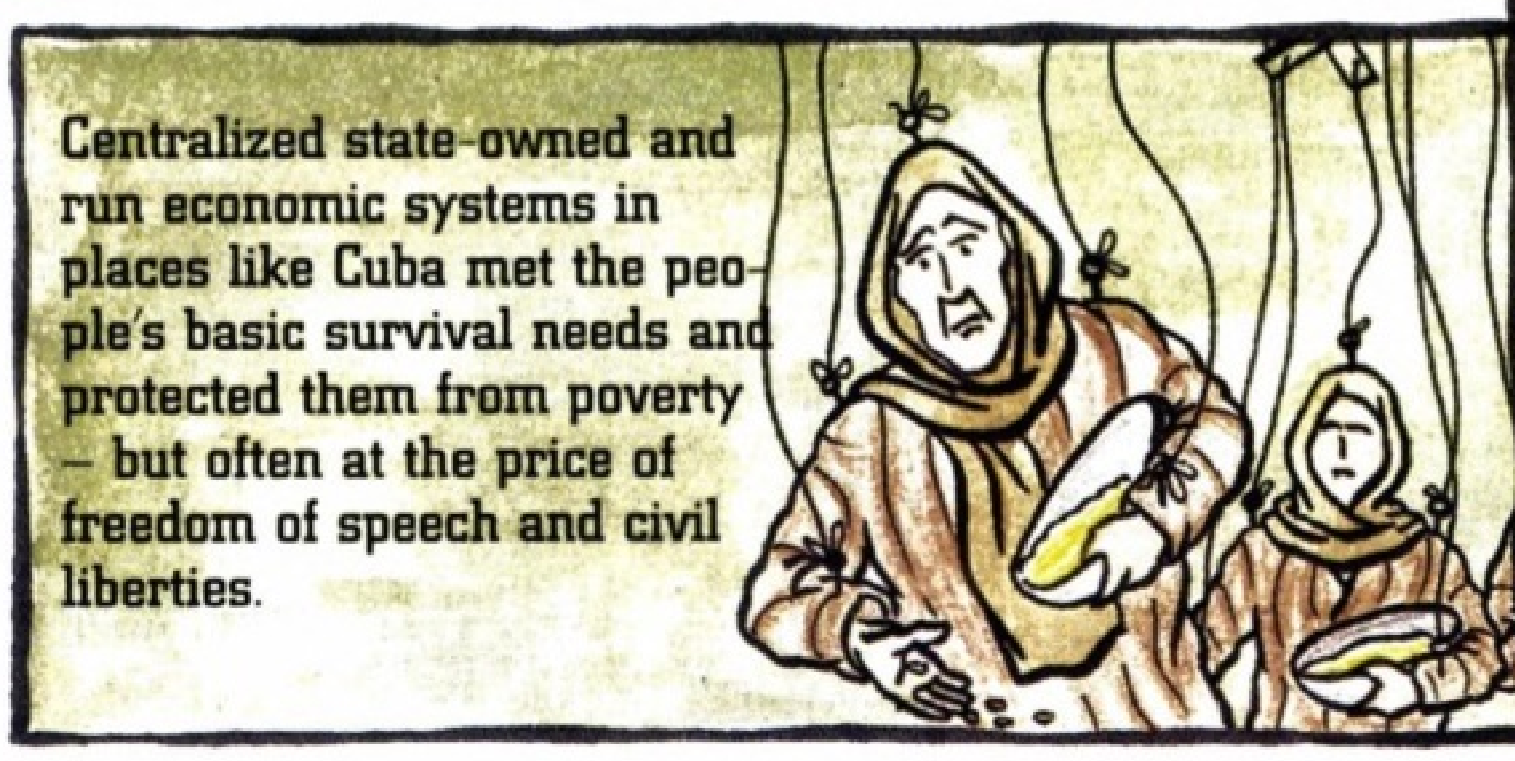

BUENOS DIAS.
IN THE NAME OF SUPERIOR FIRE-POWER, WHERE'S THE GOLD?



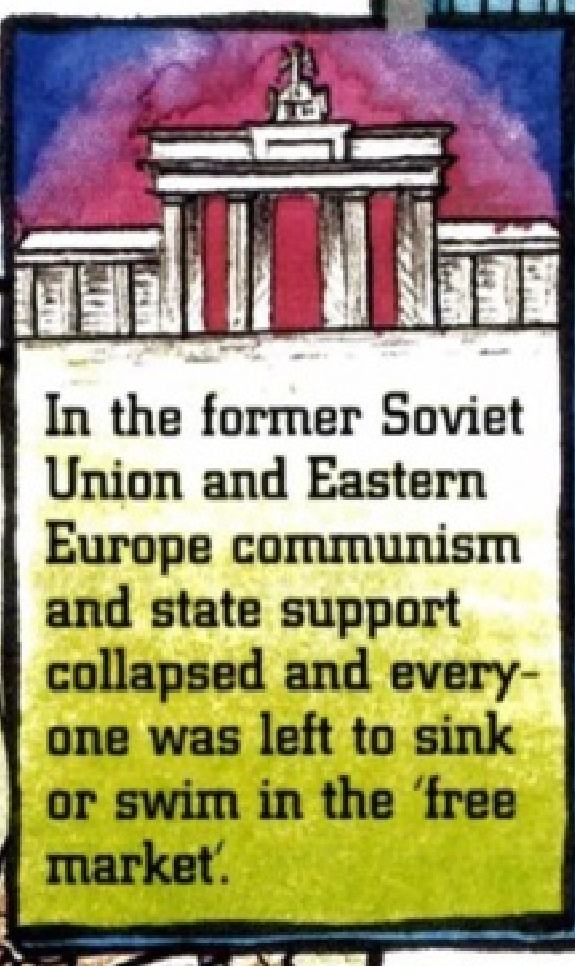
Independence brought huge optimism to the former colonies and the belief that poverty would be abolished and wealth available to all. But the old colonial rulers took much of the wealth with them, leaving the new nations with little expertise and less money.



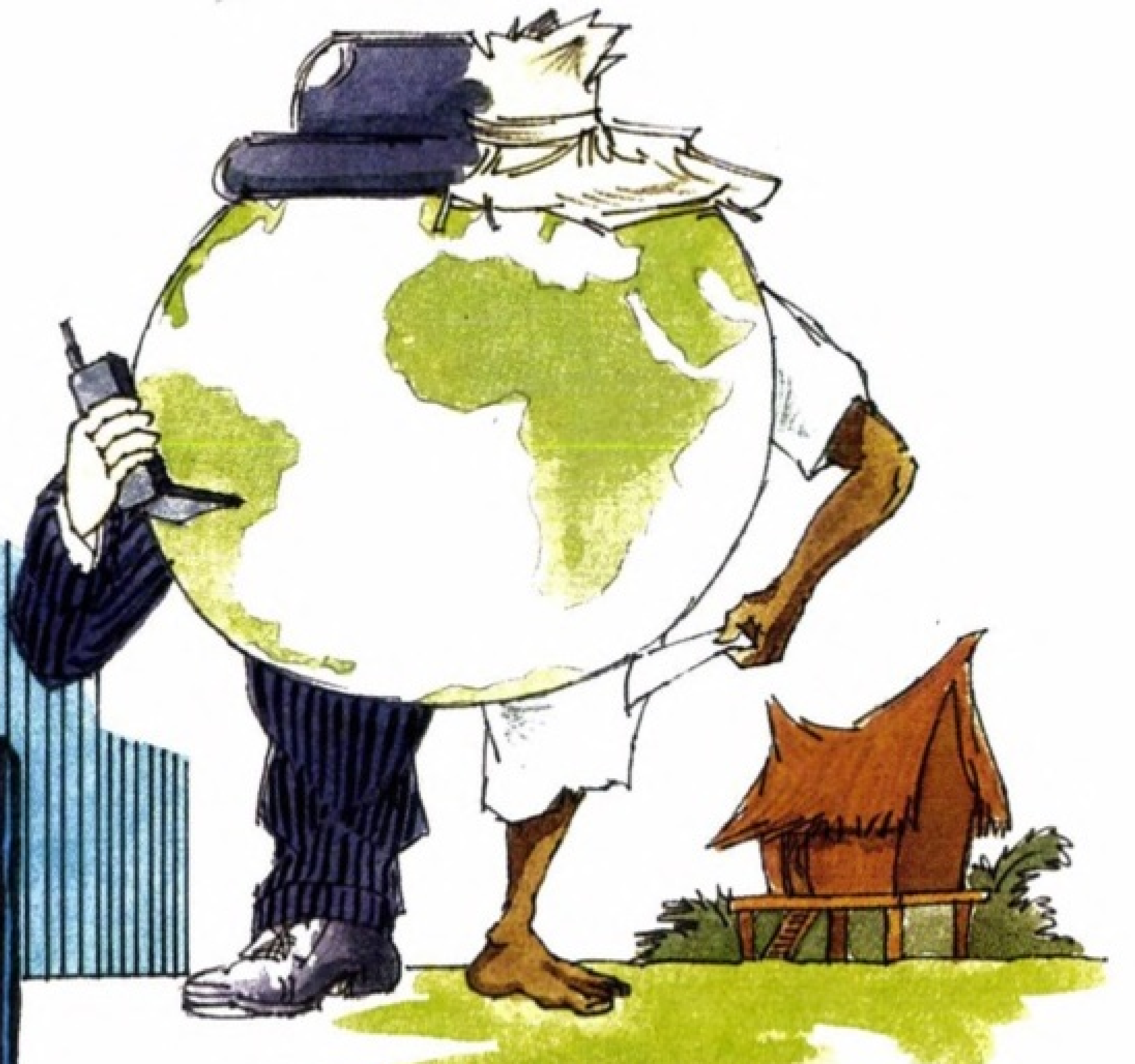
The setting up of the United Nations provided a new global context for looking at poverty, based on the capitalist belief that the market would eradicate poverty as wealth 'trickled down' to the poor.



Centralized state-owned and run economic systems in places like Cuba met the people's basic survival needs and protected them from poverty – but often at the price of freedom of speech and civil liberties.



In the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe communism and state support collapsed and everyone was left to sink or swim in the 'free market'.



Today global capital reigns supreme. Money has become the only measure of status, wealth and power in an ever-shrinking world. The number of poor people has increased, as has the gap between rich and poor.

Waiting for God – or a doctor – in a Mozambique hospital.

GIDEON MENDEL / MAGNUM

A pound of flesh

Joseph Hanlon reports on how local people have wised up to a huge international hoax.

We walk into a crowded waiting room with patients clutching their x-rays, and ask the first three people how much they paid. All three paid the right amount. Then we ask if they have a receipt; only one does. That means hospital staff pocketed the 30,000 *meticais* ($2.50) each from the other two.

It is a small mark of the corruption and poor care that patients now face in the Maputo Central Hospital, the largest and most modern in Mozambique.

I am accompanied by Dr João Alexandre, head of the x-ray section of the hospital's emergency room. 'Today we will have to stop all x-rays except the most urgent, because we have run out of the fixer used on the x-ray film after development,' he admits. 'And that creates the conditions for petty corruption – late at night, a small amount of money will convince a technician that your case is one of the most urgent.'

Wages are low. A senior nurse in the central hospital earns 700,000 *meticais* per month (under $60) which is not enough to provide basic food and clothing for her family. The United Nations estimate of the household poverty line for Mozambique is $75 per month.

'But it is not just salaries; it is the lack of materials. There are no gloves, and nurses know that in a country with a high incidence of AIDS, they are risking the lives of their patients – and endangering their own. People become nurses because they want to help. But they become demoralized because they don't have the conditions to do their job. They reach a level of despair where they lose all professional pride; corruption and an animal spirit takes over,' explains Otilia Pacule, a 33-year-old economist and the co-ordinator of a national group campaigning for the cancellation of Mozambique's debt.

Dr Alexandre agrees with her. 'With no x-ray, it is harder to diagnose. But what is the point of diagnosing, when you know there are no medicines for treatment?'

Pacule gets angry about hospital staff demanding bribes: 'It's immoral. But people in hospital are sick and vulnerable; they are afraid to refuse and afraid to denounce corruption.'

Even Otilia can remember a time when the Central Hospital was not like this. After independence in 1975, the transformation of the health service to one providing better care for all was seen as a real triumph. The World Health Organization cited Mozambique for special praise.

But for Pacule, the key to the problem does not lie with the Central Hospital. 'The problem is our huge foreign debt. We have such a tiny health budget because we pay so much debt service.'

Mozambique's past

The reasons for the debt go back a long way. Mozambique is famous for its beautiful Indian Ocean beaches and luscious prawns, but until 1975 when the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) finally won its 13-year war for independence, it was a colony of fascist Portugal.

The newly independent country did not have an auspicious start. Its two biggest neighbours, Rhodesia and South Africa, were still ruled by white minorities. When in 1980 Rhodesia won independence as Zimbabwe, the two countries helped the African National Congress to fight for majority rule in South Africa. The apartheid state fought back in the most brutal way, waging a war against Mozambique that did an incredible $25 billion in damage; a million people died and a third of all Mozambicans were forced to flee their homes. South Africa directly attacked social facilities, backing the Renamo guerillas who destroyed half of all schools and health units – even massacring patients as they lay in their hospital beds. Factories, railways and bridges were destroyed, crippling the economy.

The crisis was made worse because the United States and the West backed apartheid South Africa as an anti-Communist bastion during the Cold War.

When apartheid ended in 1992, South Africa stopped waging war on Mozambique. But the country had been forced to borrow huge amounts of money for importing oil, food, clothing and arms to fight the war. Much of the support given to Mozambique to help it defend itself against apartheid was called 'solidarity' but it was often loans rather than aid.

The crunch came in 1991, when the

International Monetary Fund (IMF) said that the Mozambican Government had to reduce its spending. Since the IMF also said Mozambique could not decrease the repayments of its debts, the only cuts left were civil-service salaries and consumables like x-ray film fixer. Nurses and teachers started slipping below the poverty line and began to look for other sources of income.

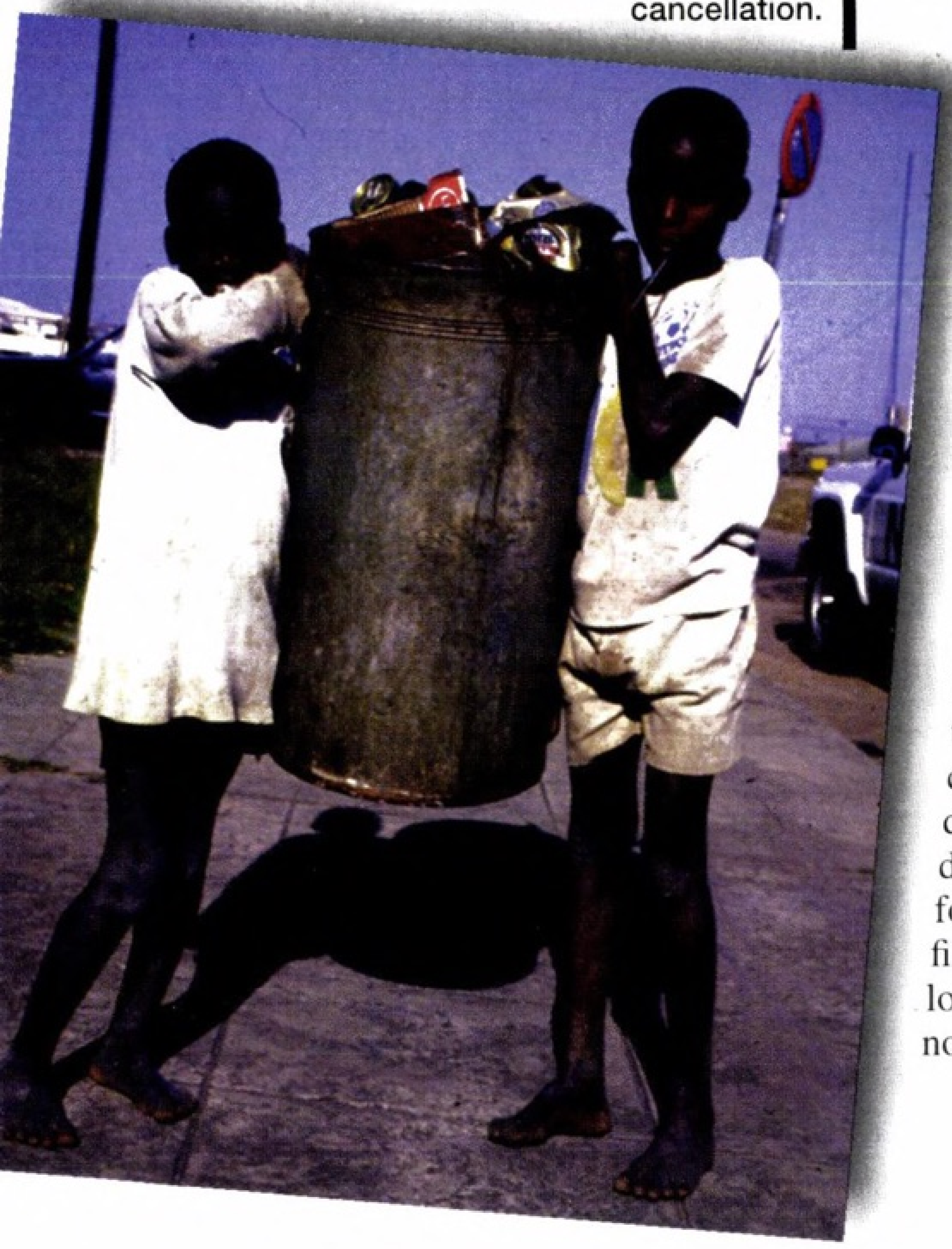
By 1992, the debt had mounted to more than $7 billion. Since then Russia and many European countries have cancelled some of this, but over $5 billion remains. Each year, Mozambique is supposed to pay $350 million in debt service – that is, interest on the outstanding debt and some repayments of the debt itself (principal repayments). In reality, it pays less than a third of this – and the unpaid money is added on the total debt.

The debt trap

Clearly, the country is caught in a trap from which it can never escape. And it is not alone – all of Africa is caught in a similar vice caused by wars, falling prices of exports, and foolish economic policies imposed by the IMF and Western donors. For most of Africa, debt is all that is left of the Cold War – the people of DR Congo, for example, are now expected to repay $13 billion which was lent to Mobutu. The West knew he would build palaces and put the money in Swiss banks, but Mobutu was a Cold War ally. Now Mobutu is dead and the Cold War is over, but the bill still has to be paid.

The recognition that much of Africa's debt is unpayable caused the international community to agree, for the first time ever, that some debts could be cancelled. In 1996 the World Bank and IMF agreed the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative. It is a slow and ponderous process involving an army of accountants, but on 7 April 1998 the Bank and Fund agreed with other creditors that more than $2 billion of Mozambique's debts should be cancelled in mid-1999. Mozambique is, so far, the biggest beneficiary of HIPC debt cancellation.

Dumping the debt – as children in Mozambique's capital Maputo empty the garbage, local people ask for debt cancellation.



GARY TROTTER

The World Bank issued a press release saying that the deal would 'free budgetary resources and allow Mozambique to broaden the scope of its development effort.' Suddenly, there seemed to be hope for Mozambique's schools and hospitals.

But on 4 December 1998 Deputy Finance and Planning Minister Luisa Diogo told a shocked parliament that 'the HIPC Initiative will not produce any significant impact on the volume of future [debt service] payments'. After HIPC the country will still be paying back $100 million a year; just $10 million less than the $111 million it has been able to pay, she said. This is unlikely to release many budget resources for health or development.

HIPC turns out to be a cruel hoax – an accounting trick. The World Bank and IMF agreed to cancel only that part of the debt that Mozambique was not paying in any case – that part which was being 'rolled over' each year. HIPC only cancels the uncollectable debt.

The $100 million per year that Mozambique continues to spend on debt service is more than the Government's current spending on health and education combined. Donors do top up that money – and the World Bank lends Mozambique an extra $25 million a year for health, forcing Mozambique into a deeper debt trap as it struggles to repay its old debts.

But the reason that there is no fixer for the x-ray films in the Central Hospital, the reason for the lack of medicines, and the reason for poverty wages for senior nurses and technicians is that each day Mozambique's Government pays $275,000 in debt service, while it pays only $100,000 per day for the entire health service, of which less than $20,000 goes to the three biggest hospitals.

Bringing pressure

Initially the Government and most Mozambicans thought there was nothing to be done. But in 1996 several local civil-society groups – trade unions, student groups, peasant associations and development charities – came together to form the Mozambican Debt Group. At first, says Pacule, people did not link the low wages to the foreign debt; they did not understand that there was enough money to pay a living wage, but that debts were being paid instead. And the Government was distrustful about civil-society involvement in what had always been seen as a Government matter. 'But when discussions on HIPC started, we made it clear we were not against the Government,' says Otilia Pacule, sitting in her small basement office. Regular meetings with the Minister and Deputy Minister of Finance and with Central Bank officials followed.

Each day Mozambique pays $275,000 in debt service and only $100,000 for the entire health service

In 1996 the Debt Group and Deputy Minister Luisa Diogo shared a radio phone-in programme on debt. By 1997 the Group was getting front-page headlines in the local press. Meanwhile, an international movement for debt cancellation had been launched. It is called Jubilee 2000, and aims to make the year 2000 a true jubilee year by cancelling the debts of the poorest countries. Jubilee 2000 campaigns now exist in 38 countries, North and South. A major target are the leaders of the seven most industrialized countries (the so-called G8). When they met in Birmingham, England in May 1998, they were greeted by 70,000 people holding hands to form a human chain symbolizing the chains of debt. This international grassroots protest has had a dramatic effect. It forced the G8 leaders to discuss debt in Birmingham. And Germany, the host of the June 1999 G8 summit in Cologne, has already promised new initiatives on debt.

In Mozambique, it meant that people realized it was possible to ask for more debt cancellation. Parliament has now called for total and unconditional cancellation of foreign debt. In a short time, debt cancellation has switched from being an impossible dream to something which poor-country governments actually think is a practical possibility, and which rich-country governments can no longer ignore.

But winning the battle for recognition of the problem is only the first step to winning the war. Recognition of the problem does not buy fixer for x-ray film in the Maputo Central Hospital. A lot of campaigning is still needed to convince the leaders of the rich world actually to cancel the debt. ■

Joseph Hanlon is a writer on Mozambique and author of *'Peace without profit: How the IMF blocks rebuilding in Mozambique'*. He is also a policy advisor to Jubilee 2000. Jubilee 2000, PO Box 100, London SE1 7RT. Tel: +44 171 401 9999. e-mail: mail@jubilee2000uk.org
Web site: www.jubilee2000 for local action details.
The May issue of the **NI** will focus on debt.

In the name of poverty...

What governments are doing

TO ERADICATE POVERTY, the physical, psychological and political conditions must be right. These include peace, security, and a responsible attitude to the world's resources, as well as an openness to sharing them equally. Some governments are taking poverty seriously, involving grassroots people as well as government officials in drawing up poverty plans and setting targets. In such cases, results are already beginning to show, proving that the eradication of poverty is largely a matter of political will.

CHINA

In 1994 the Government set up the 8-7 Poverty Reduction Programme, which aims to eliminate absolute poverty by the year 2000. The State Council funded several anti-poverty units and allocated $1.8 billion towards alleviating income poverty and increasing expenditure on basic education and healthcare.

COSTA RICA

Costa Rica has the lowest poverty levels in Latin America. The proportion of poor people was reduced from 28 to 20 per cent between 1989 and 1995. At the same time, the provision of jobs and a public spending programme reduced inequality. But there is still much to be done about including poor people in the debates.

IRELAND

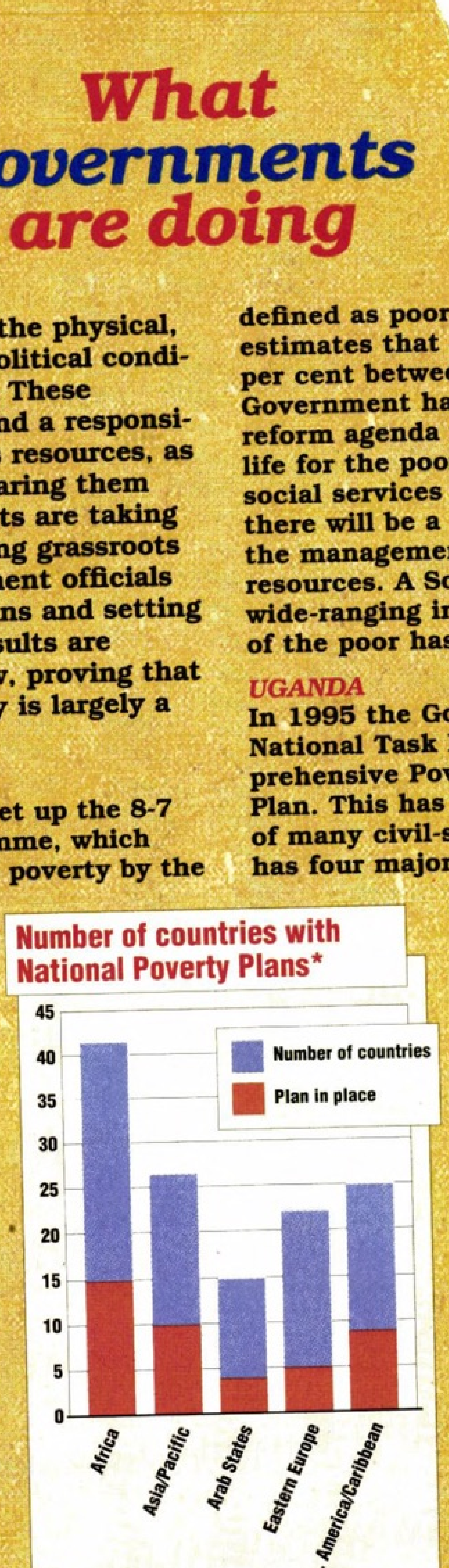
The Government has a National Anti-Poverty Strategy which aims to reduce the percentage of the population consistently poor from 9-15 per cent to under 5-10 per cent. This involves every government department and was drawn up by means of a public process that had 241 submissions, mostly from small community and voluntary organizations.

PHILIPPINES

4.56 million families are officially defined as poor, though the Government estimates that poverty declined by 4.2 per cent between 1991 and 1994. The Government has implemented a social-reform agenda which aims to improve life for the poor majority. Access to social services will be improved and there will be a sustainable approach to the management and use of natural resources. A Social Reform Council with wide-ranging involvement of all sectors of the poor has also been established.

UGANDA

In 1995 the Government set up a National Task Force to formulate a comprehensive Poverty Eradication Action Plan. This has involved the participation of many civil-society organizations and has four major components: infrastructure development, human resource development, good governance and rural development.



Number of countries with National Poverty Plans*

UNITED KINGDOM

The Government has identified poverty and social exclusion as a key issue, though it does not yet have any formal anti-poverty strategy with goals and targets. It has set up a Social Exclusion Unit and and a Low Pay Commission. Direct communication with people in poverty remains ad-hoc.

UNITED STATES

A Welfare Reform Act implemented in 1996 reduced national government spending on social development and cut the level and duration of benefits, though there was an increase in the minimum wage – the first for a decade. Estimates suggest that by 2002 the Act will result in 2.6 million more people living below the federal poverty line.

Details from **Social Watch (Instituto del Tercer Mundo), Jackson 1136, Montevideo 11200, Uruguay. Fax: + 598 (2) 401 9222**
e-mail: item@chasque.apc.org
Website: http://www.socwatch.org.uy

What people

PEOPLE experiencing poverty say that change will only happen if they are listened to. Empowerment, equality and, of course, economic change, are the three 'Es' on which any poverty programme must be based.

Empowerment

'To the country's leaders I say: give us back our voice, you have stolen it. Give us back our dignity and allow us the tools with which to help ourselves.'
UK Coalition Against Poverty

'The poor do not want you to impose your programmes to empower us. We know how to empower ourselves. We want your support for our decisions.'
Karuawathie Menike, People's Rural Development Association, Sri Lanka

'We need a global movement to secure the quality of life of local people and access to credit, health, education. Development and globalization, as we have clearly seen in Indonesia, are not the way to solve poverty.'
Dani Wahyu Munggoro, LATIN, Indonesia.

Equality

A poor woman in Nairobi, Kenya, was asked what event she would change in her life. She replied: 'I would be born a man'.
Breaking the barriers: women and the elimination of world poverty (DFID 1999).

'We need a change in attitude; if only people could stop looking down on the poor and recognize they have the same rights, the world would be a

THE WORDS ARE CERTAINLY THERE – the past few years have seen an abundance of reports, targets, measurements and action plans produced on the subject of poverty eradication. Officially at least, it is a major priority for the beginning of the next century. But until those experiencing poverty are properly consulted and their needs put at the centre of such plans – and until we are all prepared seriously to address the central issue of the world's increasing inequality – well then, words are only words...

poor want

better place.'
ATD Fourth World, France

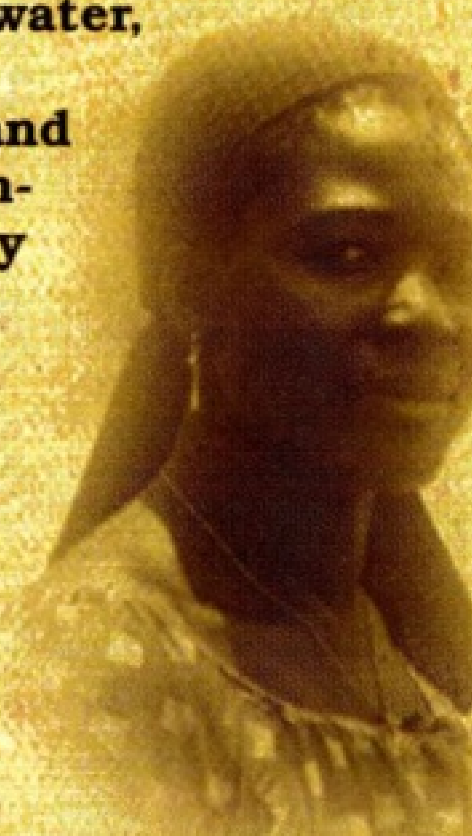
'The single most important factor in eradicating poverty is the way we think. We have to explode the myths that make it seem hopeless and/or lead us down the wrong path, and arm ourselves with a clear vision of real causes and alternative solutions.'
Food First, US

Economics

'To overcome poverty we need the poor to have control over land and resources.'
Chathi, tribal from India.

'Access to financial services, especially credit for self-employment, targeted at the poorest of the poor, especially women, is perhaps the most powerful tool in combating poverty.'
Shan Ali, Grameen Bank, Bangladesh

'Economic policies which generate growing inequality are the biggest barrier to the eradication of poverty.'
Food First, US



'People have to be given access to education, healthcare, safe water, adequate nutrition and family planning if they are to be helped to break vicious cycles of poverty.'
Casa Alianza, Honduras

What the United Nations says

All the global conferences in the 1990s made agreements to reduce poverty. At the United Nations Social Summit in 1995 the world's governments committed themselves to poverty eradication as 'an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind'. The 20:20 Initiative, also endorsed by the Social Summit, stipulates that governments should mobilize 20 per cent of their budgets – and donors of their aid budgets – to cover basic social services for all.

Below, the NI sets out some of the targets – and estimates how likely they are to be achieved.

POVERTY

In 1996 the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) adopted the goal of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by the year 2015.
ACHIEVABILITY RATING: 9/10
Possible – but will it happen? It would take a concerted effort on the part of the international community and all the governments of the world to make this a real priority. So 9/10 as a possibility but 0/10 if the political will is lacking.

LIFE EXPECTANCY

By 2000 to reach a life expectancy of at least 60 years in every country. By 2005 to reach a life expectancy greater than 70. And by 2015 to hit 75 or more.
ACHIEVABILITY RATING: 0/10
Dream on: Life expectancy has improved considerably in the last 20 years and is likely to continue to do so – but not in all parts of the world. Nearly a third of people in the least-developed countries are not expected to survive to the age of 40.

CHILD MORTALITY

By 2000 to reduce under-five mortality by a third from the 1990 level or to 70 per 1,000 births, and by 2015 to less than 45 per 1,000 births.
ACHIEVABILITY RATING: 6/10
A touch more realistic this one, but still too many children die of hunger or preventable diseases, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. The under-five mortality rate is still 95 per 1,000 births in the South though it is 18 per 1,000 in the North.

HEALTH

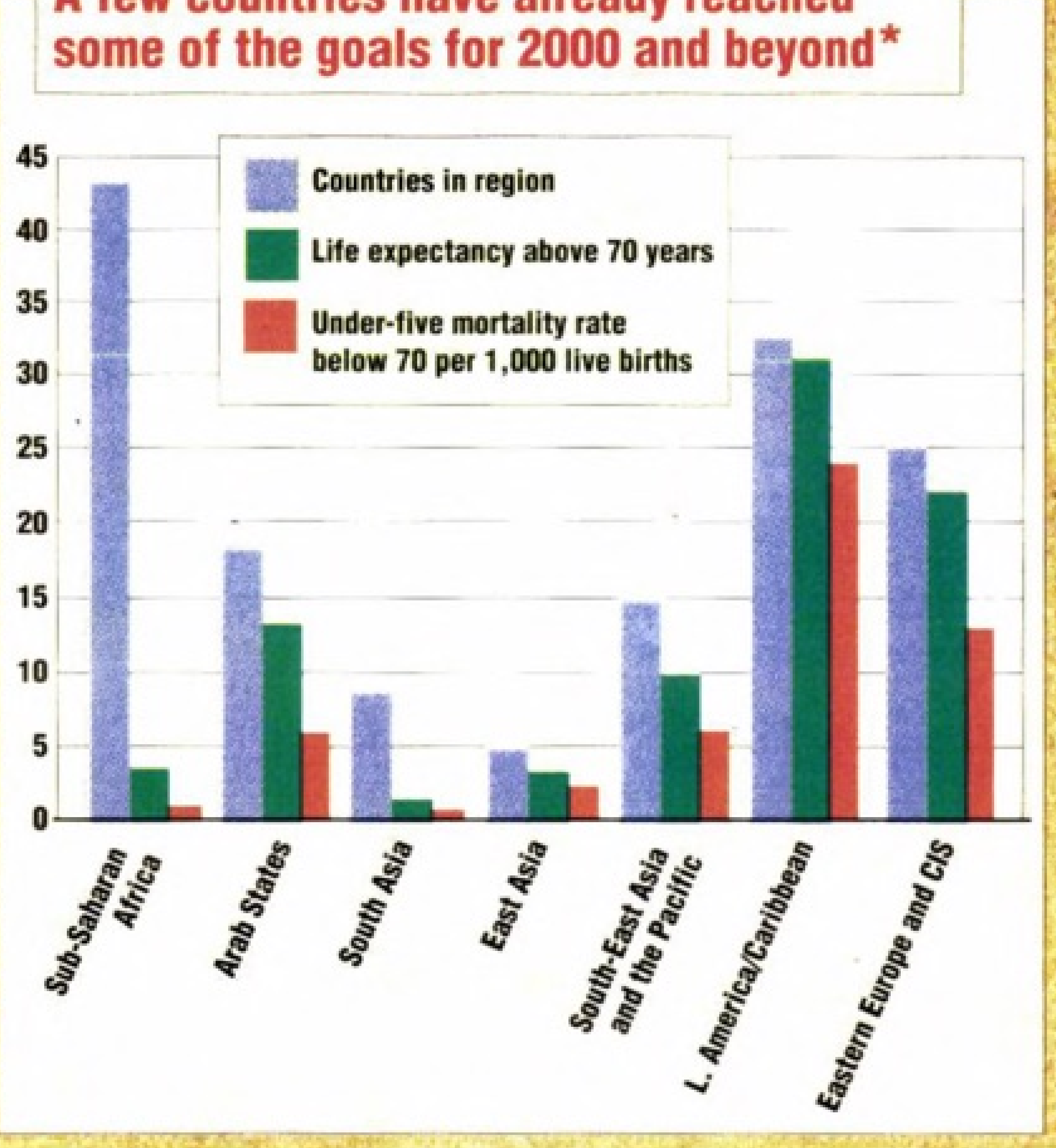
By 2000 to achieve universal access to high-quality and affordable primary healthcare. Eliminate polio, guinea-worm disease, iodine deficiency disorders and vitamin A deficiency.
ACHIEVABILITY RATING: 5/10
Full marks for polio and iodine deficiency. There's a lot less of it now. But it's always much easier to have specific targets than universal ones, such as ensuring that everyone has access to healthcare. That involves governments spending big money, when actually the current trend is to cut back on health spending and to privatize services.

EDUCATION

By 2000 to achieve universal access to basic education and the completion of primary education by at least 80 per cent of primary-school age children and by 2015, universal primary education in all countries.
ACHIEVABILITY RATING: 4/10
Oh yes? And where are debt-burdened countries in the Majority World going to get the money from to spend on education?

GENDER INEQUALITY

By 2005 to close the gender gap in primary and secondary school education and by 2020 reduce female illiteracy by at least half from its 1990 level.
ACHIEVABILITY RATING: 5/10
Quite possible in some countries; extremely unlikely in others. Between 1970 and 1995 adult illiteracy declined by nearly half from 57 to 30 per cent – two-thirds of the remaining 840 million illiterates are women.



**Human Development Report* 1998 (UNDP).
Photos: Julio Etchart (top); E. Jane Mundy (middle); Kay Muldoon (bottom).

The simple life

Eradicating poverty involves changing the lives of the non-poor. Gerald Iversen, director of Alternatives, an organization which promotes 'voluntary simplicity', explains.

Living simply is not about 'living on the cheap'. It's more than frugality, far from being a tightwad, and surely not about being a miser. Rather, it's a journey to find more meaning, more joy, more fun in life by removing the barrier of material goods that keeps us apart from other people – and even from ourselves.

Voluntary Simplicity is based on five 'life principles':

- do justice
- nurture people, not things
- learn from the world community
- care for the earth
- don't conform*

Living more simply is about seeing our lives as extravagant, even out-of-control, and deciding what to do little by little, day-by-day, week-by-week to cut down on over-consumption. Every time you go to buy something, to use something, try thinking: Do I really need this?

IAN MOORE

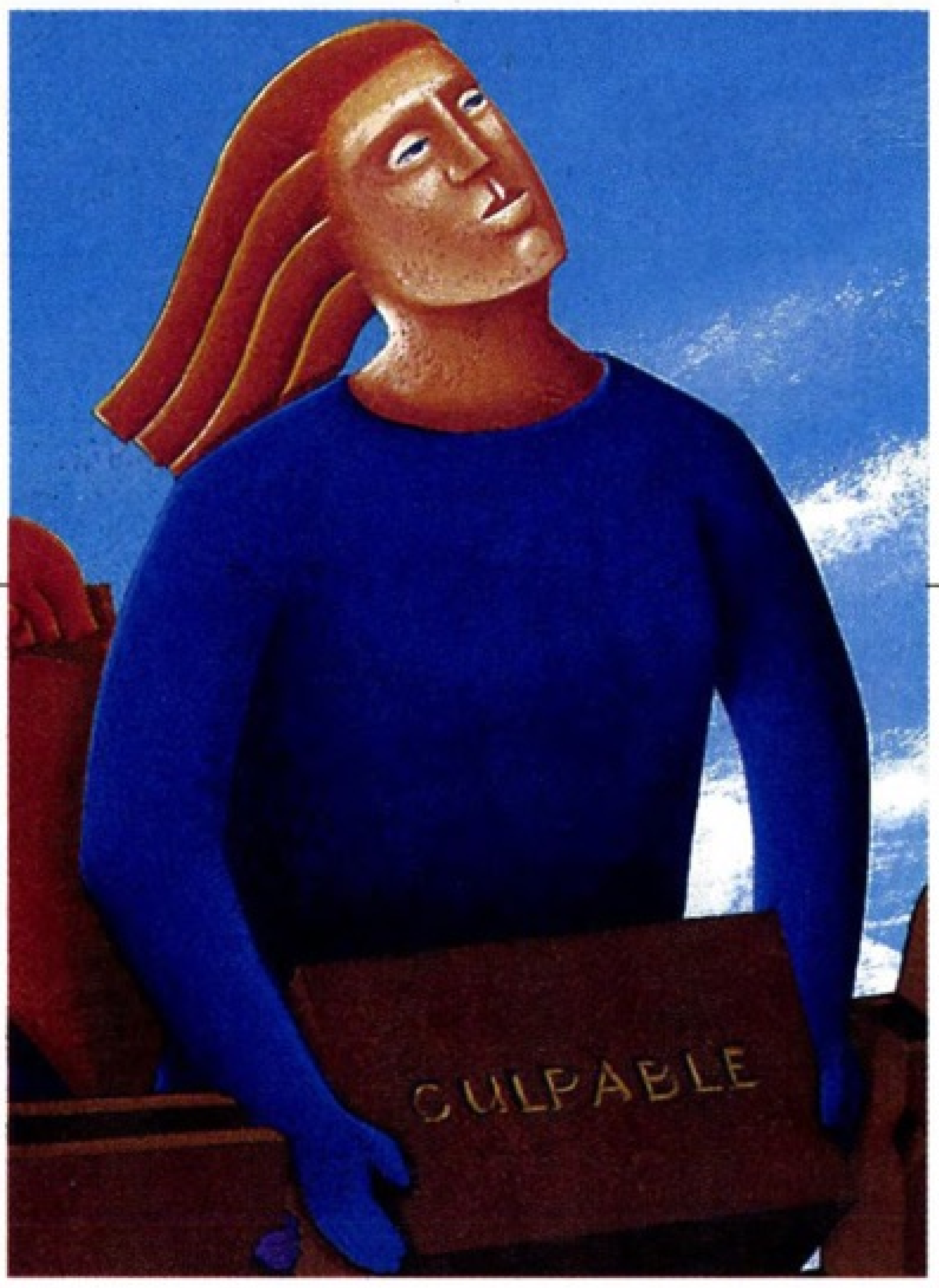
Do I buy the car I like, the one that will impress? Or do I buy the economical one... the one that will get me around using less gas? Can I live without a car, using alternative transport?

For every negative, wasteful habit, there is a positive, constructive one (or at least one that's less wasteful).

It's not simple – but it is well worth it.

Gerald Iversen is National Co-ordinator of the US-based movement *Alternatives* which can be contacted at 5312 Morningside Ave, PO Box 2857, Sioux City, Iowa 51106 (formerly Ellenwood, Georgia), Tel: +1 712/274-8875 or +1 800/821-6153, Fax: +1 712/274-1402. e-mail: Alternatives@SimpleLiving.org. Web site: http://www.SimpleLiving.org

* from *Living More with Less* by Doris Janzen Longacre.

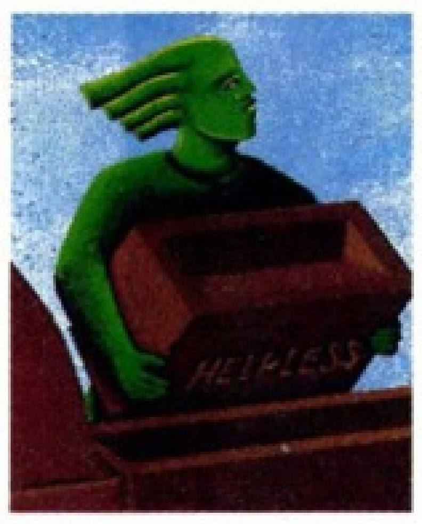


ACTION

Here are just a few of the many organizations working on poverty in a particpatory way. The main aid agencies in each country focus mainly on poverty overseas. The United Nations Development Programme produces an annual *Human Development Report* and both 1997 and 1998 are full of information and statistics on poverty.

AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND

Child Poverty Action Aotearoa, c/o Susan St John, Economics Dept, Private Bag 92019, Auckland. Fax: +64 9 373 7427. Website: http://thor.he.net/~cpanz/ Formed in 1994 to achieve better policies for children and young people.



AUSTRALIA

Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS), Locked Bag 4777 Strawberry Hills NSW 2012. Tel: +61 2 9310 4844. Fax: +61 2 9310 4822. Website: http://www.acoss.org.au A campaigning body which acts as the principal voice of low-income and disadvantaged people in social and economic policy matters.

BRITAIN

ATD Fourth World, 48 Addington Square, London SE5 7LB. Tel: +44 171 703 3231; Fax: +44 171 252 4276. Website: http://web.ukonline.co.uk/atd.uk An international human-rights organization which works in partnership with people living in poverty, supporting their efforts to overcome social exclusion and to take an active role in the development of society.

Child Poverty Action Group, 94 White Lion St, London N1 9P7. Tel: +44 171 837 7979. Fax: +44 171 837 6414. Promotes action for the relief of poverty among children and families.

Oxfam GB Poverty Programme, 274 Banbury Rd, Oxford OX2 7DZ. Tel: +44 1865 313107. Engaged in policy and advocacy work and supports anti-poverty groups in the UK as well as fostering links between poor people in different parts of the world.

Single Parent Action Network, Millpond, Baptist St, Easton, Bristol BS5 OYW. Tel: +44 117 951 423; Fax: +44 117 935 5208. Challenges stereotypes and has produced a report on media coverage of single parents called *Positive Images, Negative Stereotypes.*

UK Coalition Against Poverty, 17 Grove Lane, London SE5 8RD. Tel: +44 171 703 5400; Fax: +44 171 703 5745. Promotes the participation of people with experience of poverty in partnerships between local, national and international organizations to work towards the reduction and eradication of poverty and to campaign for a National Poverty Eradication Plan. Produced an excellent action pack, *Eradicate Poverty!*

CANADA

National Anti-Poverty Organization, 440-325 Dalhousie St, Ottawa, ON K1N 7G2. Tel: +1 613 789 0096; Fax:+ 1 613 789 0141. e-mail: napo@web.net Website: www.napo-onap.ca A national voice for Canada's poor. Assists anti-poverty organizations, prepares research and lobbies government.

Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, 58 Queen St West, Kitchener, ON. Tel: +1 519 746 4090; Fax +1 519 746 4096. e-mail: Qic@web.net Website: www.web.net/~gccwat/ocap/index.html Activist group involved in public education on causes of poverty. Innovative action campaigns on homelessness and government social service cut-backs.

Child Poverty in Canada/Campaign 2000, c/o Family Service Association of Metropolitan Toronto, 355 Church St, Toronto, ON M5B 1Z8. Tel: +1 416 595 9230; Fax: 416 595 0242. e-mail: jrpopham@web.net Website: www.web.net/~rpopham/campaign 2000 Non-partisan coalition of national and community groups aiming to build awareness and support for the elimination of child poverty in Canada by the year 2000.

UNITED STATES

Food First/The Institute for Food and Development Policy, 398 60th Street, Oakland, California 94618. Tel: +1 510 654 4400; Fax: +1 510 654 4551; Website: www.foodfirst.org A not-for-profit research and education-for-action center dedicated to eliminating the injustices that perpetuate hunger in the US and around the world. *World Hunger: 12 Myths,* written by Frances Moore Lappé, Joseph Collins and Peter Rosset of Food First (Earthscan 1998) makes excellent reading.

You might also like to read the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) Bulletin Vol 29 No 1 *Poverty North and South* which has a range of articles on the similarities between poverty in different parts of the world. Available from email: idsbooks@sussex.ac.uk And if you want to know what the World Bank is thinking, there is a website called 'Poverty Net' http://www.worldbank.org/poverty

Thanks to: The people of ACCORD and AMS in Gudalur; Audrey Bronstein and colleagues at Oxfam's GB Poverty Programme; Cheryl Brown at TIRN; Davenport Action Against Poverty; John Gaventa at IDS; Humaira Haider at the UK Coalition Against Poverty; Jean Penet at ATD Fourth World; Tina Wallace; Social Watch.

ANSWERS TO POVERTY QUIZ ON PAGE 11

1 Australia (Figures from ACOSS) **2** Nothing. In fact, the poor world gives to the rich in loan and debt repayments. For example, between 1983 and 1989, creditors in the rich world received $242 billion more from these poor countries than they provided in new loans. **3** Mahatma (M K) Gandhi. **4** 2,500 million people – 47 per cent of the world's people. **5** United States. **6** Britain (UK Coalition Against Poverty). **7** All of them – including Australia. **8** 31 per cent **9** The World Bank in its 1990 *World Development Report* on poverty. **10** -7.1 per cent *(The Reality of Aid 1998/9)* **11** Nadine Gordimer, winner of the 1991 Nobel prize for literature. **12** Former Soviet Union.

Jean 'Binta' Breeze

Henry Palmer chats with a Jamaican 'dub' poet who is intent on telling stories with a political edge.

Giving it her all: Dub poet Breeze reads from her book *On the Edge of an Island.*

JOHN RICE

DESPITE her small stature and soft features 'dub poet' Jean 'Binta' Breeze is renowned for a powerful stage presence. The Black American writer Maya Angelou personally chose Breeze to perform at her 70th birthday last year, where Breeze's spoken words were backed by the singing of a gospel choir. Angelou was so moved by the performance that as soon as it was over she stood up and walked straight into Breeze's arms.

Born in 1956, Breeze was brought up by her grandparents, who were peasant farmers in rural Jamaica. She learned early that 'there are simple pleasures in life that can help you get by'. For Breeze, these have always included poetry and performance.

When she was 30, Breeze travelled to Britain with Jamaican poet Linton Kwesi Johnson, who had already introduced European audiences to the words and rhythms of dub poetry – a fusion of reggae music and the spoken word. The rhythmic poetry first popped up in the 1970s when Jamaican DJs would chant over the instrumental B-sides of reggae records. Poets including Breeze, Linton Kwesi Johnson and the late Mikey Smith removed the music, allowing the words to speak for themselves. The product was a style of performance poetry known today as 'dub'.

Dub poetry reflected the mood of the times. 'It is a public voice, a political voice of social commentary that works to a rhythm,' Breeze says, eyes smiling from under the brim of her trilby. 'There's a strong sense of rhythm which is the rhythm of reggae. It's poetry which combines a love of language with a sense of rhythm and music while at the same time recording our stories and oral observations.'

> ***'De lord is my shepherd, I shall not want, an she scraping de las crumbs off de plate knowing ants will feed'***

Breeze is a master storyteller, writing in both standard English and Jamaican patois. But she draws her audience in as much by her physical presence and vocal range as by her words. The result is both entertainment and education, though she's not afraid to take on important issues. Dub poetry, she stresses, has a role to play in bringing otherwise complex issues into the lives of ordinary people. She is not afraid to tackle the IMF or Third World debt. But most remarkable of all is the way Breeze brings the stories behind these issues to life.

She grapples not with academic concepts, but with the powerful emotions of real people's lives. In her collection of poetry, *Spring Cleaning*, Breeze reworks the 23rd psalm to powerful effect: 'De lord is my shepherd, I shall not want, an she scraping de las crumbs off de plate knowing ants will feed.' Her words are also pointedly graphic, she is capable of inserting explosive imagery in the midst of a bleak word picture. In 'Love Amidst the War' on her recording *Riding on de Riddym*, Breeze refers to 'the fresh lilies growing from a rotten corpse', evoking emotions of eternal hope in the face of evil.

Although a sense of history is central to the work of dub poets, Breeze refuses to be restrained by the inflexible language of history books. When the word 'colonialism' came up in our conversation she raised a hand from her glass of rum, motioning me to stop.

'Let's not call it colonialism, that is an academic term. Let's call it what it is – international theft of resources and robbery of people's land. Colonialism doesn't say that.'

According to Jean Breeze, clichéd media images and jargon help perpetuate the myth that the Third World is a hopeless case. Charity, she says with rising anger, is just a smoke-screen. 'Nobody wants to talk about money, the distribution of wealth or how this thing was set up in the first place. Once you raise that you are faced with a lot of questions that are avoided all the time.'

One such question is the issue of Third World debt. 'All our countries are in debt to the World Bank and the IMF,' snorts Breeze. She tilts forward, partially lifting herself out of the chair. 'We are in debt to the very ones who stole from us in the first place.' Point made. She breaks into warm, loud laughter.

Dub poetry has been criticized for being too political. But Breeze shrugs off the criticism, noting that her art is rooted firmly in social and political conflict. She is more worried by the stereotype that Third World writers and thinkers are mired in the past and that the full range of art and social comment from the South goes unnoticed. 'There is this suggestion that we are all there trying to deal with our colonial heritage, instead of actually being at the forefront of what is happening politically in the world today.'

As illustration she points to the work of her contemporary, Linton Kwesi Johnson, writing on his new album *More Time* about the need for a shorter working week. And if you look at the work of Breeze herself it's clear that her vision extends way beyond the idea of herself as a post-colonial subject.

She deals with an enormous variety of themes. Her most recent published collection of poetry and prose, *On the Edge of an Island,* contains some beautiful writing about life and culture in her beloved Jamaica. In the prose piece, 'Sunday Cricket', Breeze begins: 'Look man, is a hard ting wen is Easter Sunday, West Indies battin, an yuh wife decide dat de whole family have to go to church.'

Breeze considers these meditations on her island culture a kind of personal communion. 'They come from my healing side,' she says. 'It's this side that gives me the strength to make it to another day.' ■

Henry Palmer is a UK-based freelance writer.

Reviews

film

Made in Hong Kong
directed by **Fruit Chan**

Fire
written and directed by **Deepa Mehta**

香港製造
MADE IN HONG KONG

Action, comedy and social realism in *Made in Hong Kong* (left); Sisters-in-law share a joyful moment in *Fire* (above), India's first major film about a lesbian relationship.

According to his publicity, **Made in Hong Kong**'s director Fruit Chan has worked in film ranging 'from non-profit to major studios'. In 1994 he secretly started collecting short ends of raw film stock. By 1996 he had saved more than 80,000 feet and was ready to begin his independent debut feature.

The result, **Made in Hong Kong**, blends action, comedy and social realism, the three poles of recent Hong Kong cinema. It follows a young punk and his mildly retarded side-kick through the streets and the two-bit world of the small-time con. The racket may be lively and exciting but it's hardly lucrative. Our hero lives with his mother.

Their apartment complex immediately suggests a traditional motif of social realism – gigantic, noisy and decrepid. But Chan is too hip to let his audience take pity on the characters. As the hero tells Mr Big, the crime boss who sells him a gun, 'Poverty begets evil. That's the name of the game.' **Made in Hong Kong** is definitely not a 1997 film – it does not deal with the hand-over from Britain to China. And yet even the title seems to challenge the outside world: the people of Hong Kong are not simply pawns in an international game of post-colonial strategies. The island's popular cultures, and social problems are unique.

Chan's characters and script take us quite a distance from the grace of Bruce Lee's Kung-Fu or John Woo's stylized gun play. There's hardly room for a balletic kick or sweeping hand chop. Instead, in a key confrontation scene the hero and his rival smash beer bottles over each other's heads in a cramped apartment kitchen.

Unfortunately, Chan's independence only takes him so far. If there's a punk aesthetic at work, speeding along in a raw, un-staged style, the story remains, nonetheless, a traditional youth-angst tale of flawed love, a nihilist prediction: the revenge of youth.

Still, the film shows a fresh, impressive mix of genre and theme determined to provoke its audience to think. Just how romantic can a hero be who steals from his mother and keeps his underwear in the fridge?

Politics ☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆

As the first major Indian film about a lesbian relationship **Fire** was unlikely to pass unnoticed. In India, cinemas have been attacked amid calls for the movie to be banned. Hopefully the controversy will not detract from appreciation of the intelligence, sensitivity and compassionate humour of Deepa Mehta's ground-breaking feature. Set in a contemporay household in New Delhi, desire is **Fire**'s core theme. But it also highlights the tension and turmoil tearing at the characters living in urban India; pulled in contrary directions by the old and new, East and West, the spiritual and the material.

The action begins with the arrival into the family of Sita, a new young bride. Soon unhappy in her loveless marriage to the unfaithful Jatin, she finds herself drawn to, and raising the fire of thwarted passion in, her sister-in-law Radha. The latter has for years endured a childless and sexless marriage to the spiritually obsessesed Ashok. Sita also gets Radha, the heart and soul of the family fast-food-and-video shop, questioning beliefs and traditions she has never dared doubt before. Meanwhile, watching events unfold is the women's ancient and demanding mother-in-law, Biji, muted and paralyzed by a stroke but still holding tremendous sway, both literally and symbolically.

'There is no word in our language for what we feel for each other,' says Sita at one point. Maybe not, but the film leaves the passionate 'rightness' of it in no doubt. The women pay a high price for their unorthodox love, but ultimately the film is an inspiration, resisting the all too common mainstream practice of depicting non-heterosexual relationships as somehow 'doomed'. Neither does Mehta shy away from the erotic as well as the emotional richness of her theme, helped by deep warm colours, close sensuous camera work and some first-rate acting.

Politics ☆☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆☆ VB

books

The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India
by **Urvashi Butalia**

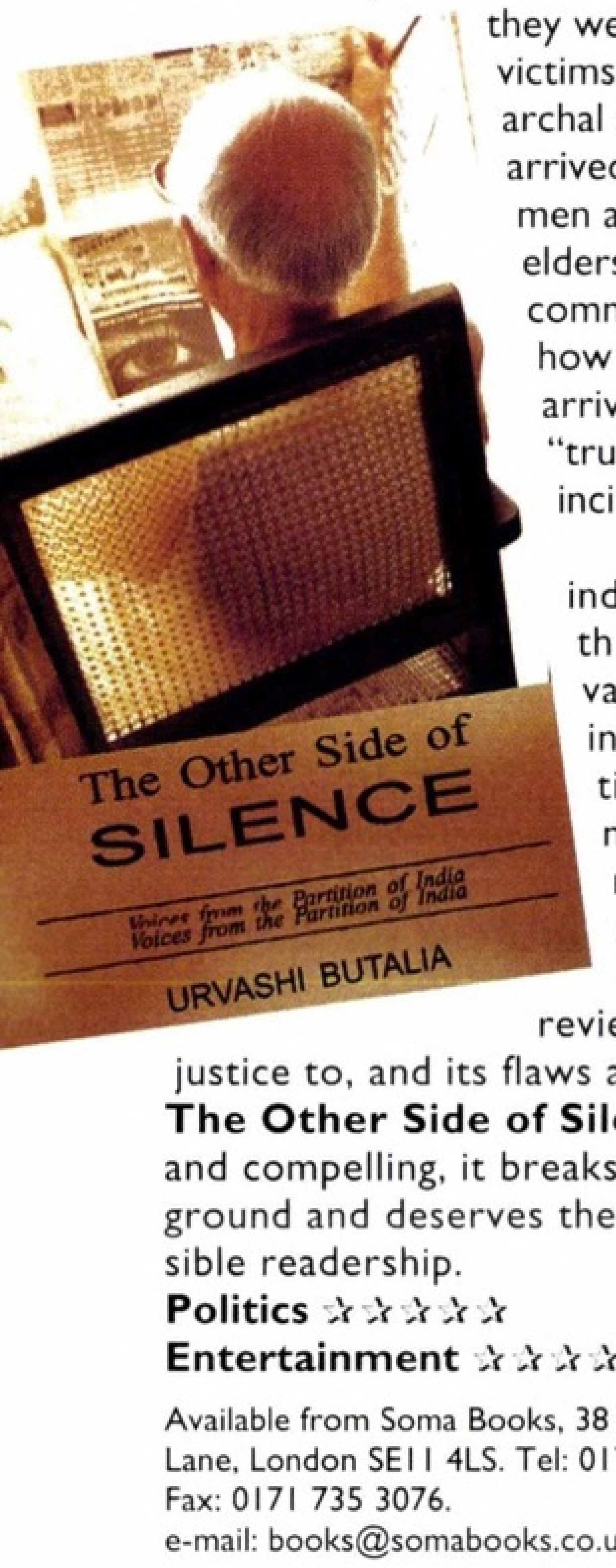
(Viking Penguin India, ISBN 0-670-87892-8)

There is no public memorial to the Partition of India which took place in 1947. Yet a million lives were lost in this period of convulsion, when the country was split into three along religious lines. Twelve million people were displaced and an estimated 75,000 women abducted and raped. Though never commemorated, the legacy of that unspeakable time is ever-present on the subcontinent, in what is at best wariness between Hindus and Muslims, and at worst murderous hatred.

The available histories of Partition are often tainted with patriotic bias or discuss political events rather than the experiences of people on the ground. With the arrival of Urvashi Butalia's courageous and incisive book the first attempt has been made to redress this imbalance. The result of years of painstaking research and numerous interviews, **The Other Side of Silence** seeks to put centre-stage the ordinary people 'upon whose bodies and lives history has been played out', especially the stories of those who have hitherto received little attention – women, children, the so-called 'scheduled castes'.

Butalia navigates the anguished and searing testimony of her interviewees with dexterity, unafraid to question the motives that colour their versions of events, never prodding them to reveal what is too painful, yet suggesting with great care what might lie behind their silences. The great strength of this book is that it doesn't strain to achieve an historian's feigned impersonality, but actively grapples with the significance of what she has heard (some of which would be too horrible to be plausible, were it fiction) and supplements it with research. Butalia is Indian and her book doesn't cover stories from the creation of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) or the Pakistani side. She does, however, begin with a look at her own mother's experience of Partition, and tracks down an uncle living in the family home in Pakistan.

The emotional core of the book is the exposition of the experiences of women during Partition, who were often subjected to rape and abduction; who were given no choice in their 'repatriation' and were often forced to abort or abandon children fathered by their abductors. Here the author's questioning intelligence comes to the fore: women's testimony is subject to greater self-censorship as it was usually not possible to interview them on their own. Often events concerning violence against women are related by the menfolk. She speaks with a man who felt compelled to kill 17 women and children of his family, rather than let them face potential rape or religious conversion, and with another who as a young boy witnessed his father's beheading of his sister and the slaughter of the womenfolk of his extended family. She speaks to a survivor of an event that has mythic status amongst Hindus – the mass suicide by jumping into a well of Punjabi women – and analyzes the motives behind such actions, getting behind the language of martyrdom and valour to confront the violence towards women from their own community. Here, as elsewhere, there are as many questions as answers: 'It is not my contention that the women who died thus in family and community violence were all victims, forced into taking their own lives, or murdered by their kinsmen. Or that they were mere victims of a "patriarchal consensus" arrived at by their men and the elders of their community. But how can we ever arrive at the "truth" of these incidents?' How indeed? But this book is a valuable step in that direction. There is much, much more to commend it than this review can do justice to, and its flaws are minor. **The Other Side of Silence** is sane and compelling, it breaks new ground and deserves the widest possible readership.



Politics ☆☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆ DG

Available from Soma Books, 38 Kennington Lane, London SE11 4LS. Tel: 0171 735 2101; Fax: 0171 735 3076.
e-mail: books@somabooks.co.uk

STAR RATING

Excellent	☆☆☆☆☆
Very good	☆☆☆☆
Good	☆☆☆
Fair	☆☆
Poor	☆

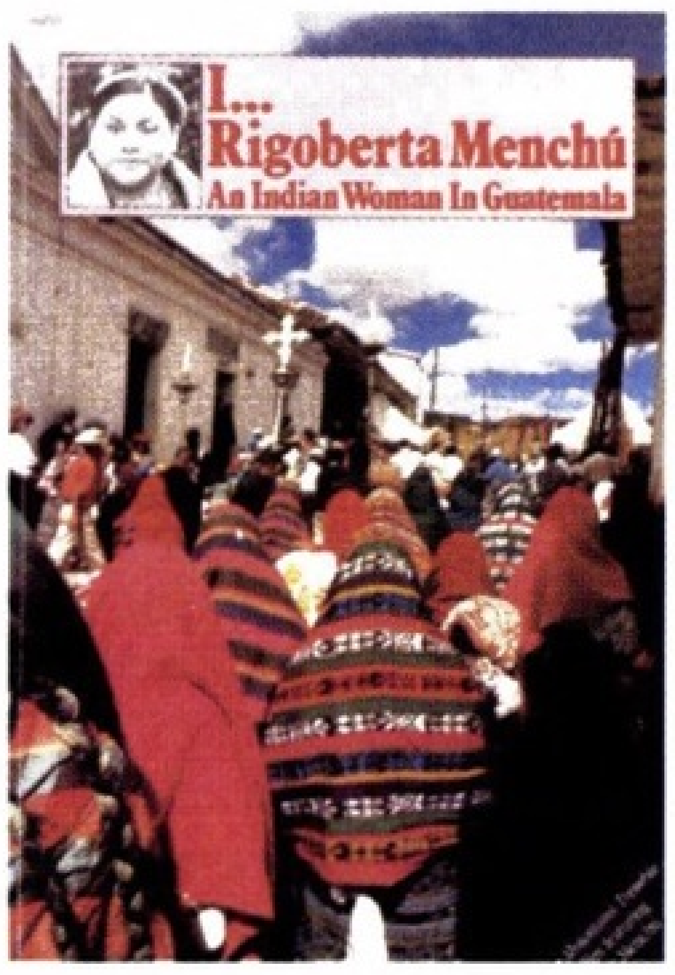
THE **CLASSIC**

I... Rigoberta Menchú

... being the story of an Indian woman in Guatemala.

Recent newspaper reports have called into question the veracity of **I... Rigoberta Menchú**, the autobiography of the Guatemalan activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner. A Harvard Professor has claimed that she conflated events, claimed as her own story things that happened to others and portrayed what was essentially a feud between families as an attack by the military on the peasant communities. In a sense, given the vagaries of oral history and the bloody and complex nature of the Guatemalan people's struggle, it is surprising that it has taken 17 years for the ideological witch-hunt that is American academia to turn its attention to Rigoberta Menchú.

Rather than engage in an arid battle over every last assertion and rebuttal, perhaps it would be more fruitful to examine those elements of Rigoberta's life which are accepted as beyond dispute and ask whether, given this history, and this alone, she deserves not only a hearing but also our respect and admiration?



Rigoberta Menchú Tum was born in 1959 in the village of Chimel, in the north-west province of El Quiché, Guatemala. She was the sixth of the nine children of Vincente Menchú, a peasant activist and Juana Tum, a midwife and traditional healer. Her people, the Quiché, were descendants of the millennium-old Maya culture and, as in several other Latin American countries, the indigenous peoples constituted the majority of the population. Despite this they were grossly exploited by the Ladino minority and their human rights were non-existent. Apart from a decade of mild reform, under the administrations of Juan José Arévaldo and Jacobo Arbenz – the latter overthrown in 1954 in a CIA-backed coup – Guatemala has suffered a succession of right-wing dictatorships under whose rule torture, murder and repression became an obscene routine.

It is against this background of death squads and genocidal terror that Rigoberta Menchú grew up, working from an early age in near-slavery conditions, on coffee plantations. When she was 12, Rigoberta was sent to Guatemala City to work as a maid in the house of an affluent landowner. It is from this time that she dates the awakening of her political awareness, saying, 'it's then that I thought like a responsible woman'. Her daily existence, in squalor amid the opulence of the Ladino household, was also a forcible reminder that Indians were viewed as scarcely human by the ruling élite.

Quitting her job, Rigoberta returned to the plantation where her family lived. Her father was an organizer of the self-defence group, Committee of Peasant Unity, and he was constantly harassed and jailed by the authorities. Increasingly, Rigoberta took on a leadership role in the organization as it grew in strength and militancy.

The regime of General Lucas Garcia, which came to power in 1978, met petitions and protests with a programme of murderous terror. Rigoberta's family, as with so many others, was destroyed by this pogrom. In 1979 her brother, Petrocinio – already at 16 a community activist – was tortured and killed by the military. In the following year her father was among a group of protesters who occupied the Spanish Embassy in Guatemala City to gain publicity for their cause. Rather than negotiate, soldiers lobbed grenades into the building. Vicente Menchú was among the 39 people who died in the subsequent fire. Three months later Rigoberta's mother was kidnapped by the army, raped, tortured and killed.

Knowing that it was only a matter of time before she met the same fate, Rigoberta fled to Mexico and a life of exile. It was on a trip to Europe in 1982 to address a conference of solidarity groups that she met Elisabeth Burgos-Debray and had the series of conversations that became **I... Rigoberta Menchú**, the now-disputed book that was to make her famous and bring to the world's attention the plight of the indigenous people of Guatemala.

After the success of her book, Rigoberta continued her tireless campaign for social justice and human rights. When, in 1992 she received the Nobel Peace Prize – becoming the youngest-ever recipient – she used the prize money to set up a foundation to further her work for peace and international solidarity. Bravely returning to Guatemala in 1994, she continues to use her high public profile to challenge the regime and advance the struggle of all indigenous people.

Many thousands have read Rigoberta Menchú's life story as one of suffering, heroism and a passionate struggle for justice. They have taken her tale as a beacon of hope to all those who may have felt helpless and inadequate in the face of so much injustice in the world. It is surely wilfully missing the point to claim that they are nothing but credulous dupes, fooled by a young woman who opened her book with the words, 'My name is Rigoberta Menchú. I am 23 years old. This is my testimony. I didn't learn it from a book, and I didn't learn it alone... My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people.' ■

by **Peter Whittaker**

I... Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala edited by **Elisabeth Burgos-Debray** *(Verso, ISBN 0 86091 083 0).*

Reviews

music

The Voice of the People

by **Various**

(Topic Records TSCD 651-670 20 CDs)

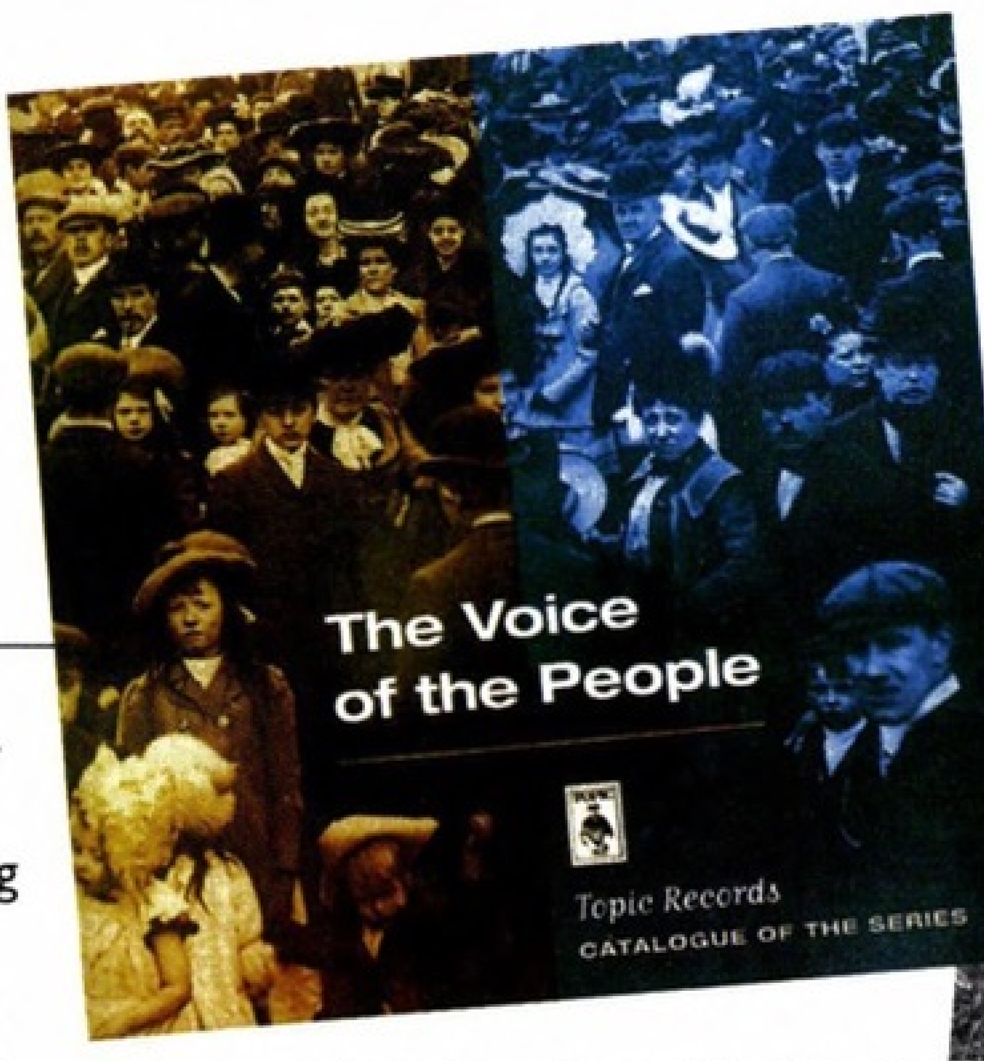
The Rough Guide to English Roots Music

by **Various**

(World Music Network RGNET 1018 CD)

Once the epitome of 'popular' music, what does folk song mean to us now? For long years it has become synonymous with culture and tradition: a type of oral history whose nuances are alive in today's music, allowing for a breadth that can pull otherwise diverse singer-songwriters into the same fold. In the Western world, at least, so broad a definition would bring (and let's suspend aesthetic considerations for a second) Bob Dylan, Kristin Hersh, Billy Bragg and (ahem) Dolly Parton into a cosy 'unplugged' clutch.

If this seems academic, it's not, as Topic's huge and mighty **Voice of the People** project shows. Don't be phased by its 20-CD size (all its volumes are available separately), for this represents a comprehensive selection of British traditional song, a far-reaching one which will rival John Lomax's Library-of-Congress collection. Compiled by musician and lecturer Reg Hall, the collection contains recordings dating from 1908 to the present day with the material arranged thematically, with volumes dedicated to all aspects of life, ranging from sea-songs to love songs to rural events, with many jigs, reels and dances along the way. Once started, it's addictive listening and the package's presentation – full sleeve-notes and lyrics – only contributes to its pleasure.



An extraordinary 20-CD folk compilation and one of the artists featured, Bob Roberts (right).

While **Voice of the People** is certainly powerful and affecting, it's fascinating also to consider the work's contemporary importance. It could be argued that these songs take on a new significance as the devolution debates in Britain force each country to reconsider its own national heritage, but their real interest lies in their ability to travel through time and distance. To listen to many of these songs is to hear the raw material of songs from Australia, Canada or the US which have, in turn, founded new traditions. But, as may be expected, those are often tales of exile and emigration. 'Farewell, My Own Dear Native Land' (Vol 4) is as poignant an example as could be imagined: songs which dwell on leaving rather than arrival.

Politics ☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆

If **Voice of the People's** keynote is not so much about abject misery as the celebration of a living art-form, then what better place to start than the **Rough Guide to English Roots Music**. This up-beat anthology concentrates on the latter-day heroes: Bragg, Norma Waterson, Martin and Eliza Carthy. The songs are recorded with the benefit of modern studios and, often, full bands; but one thing shines throughout: the clear and joyful transmission of the past into the present and future.

Politics ☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆

LG

Reviewers: **Dinyar Godrej, Louise Gray, Peter Steven** Reviews editor: **Vanessa Baird**

The NI Crossword

No. 30 by Axe

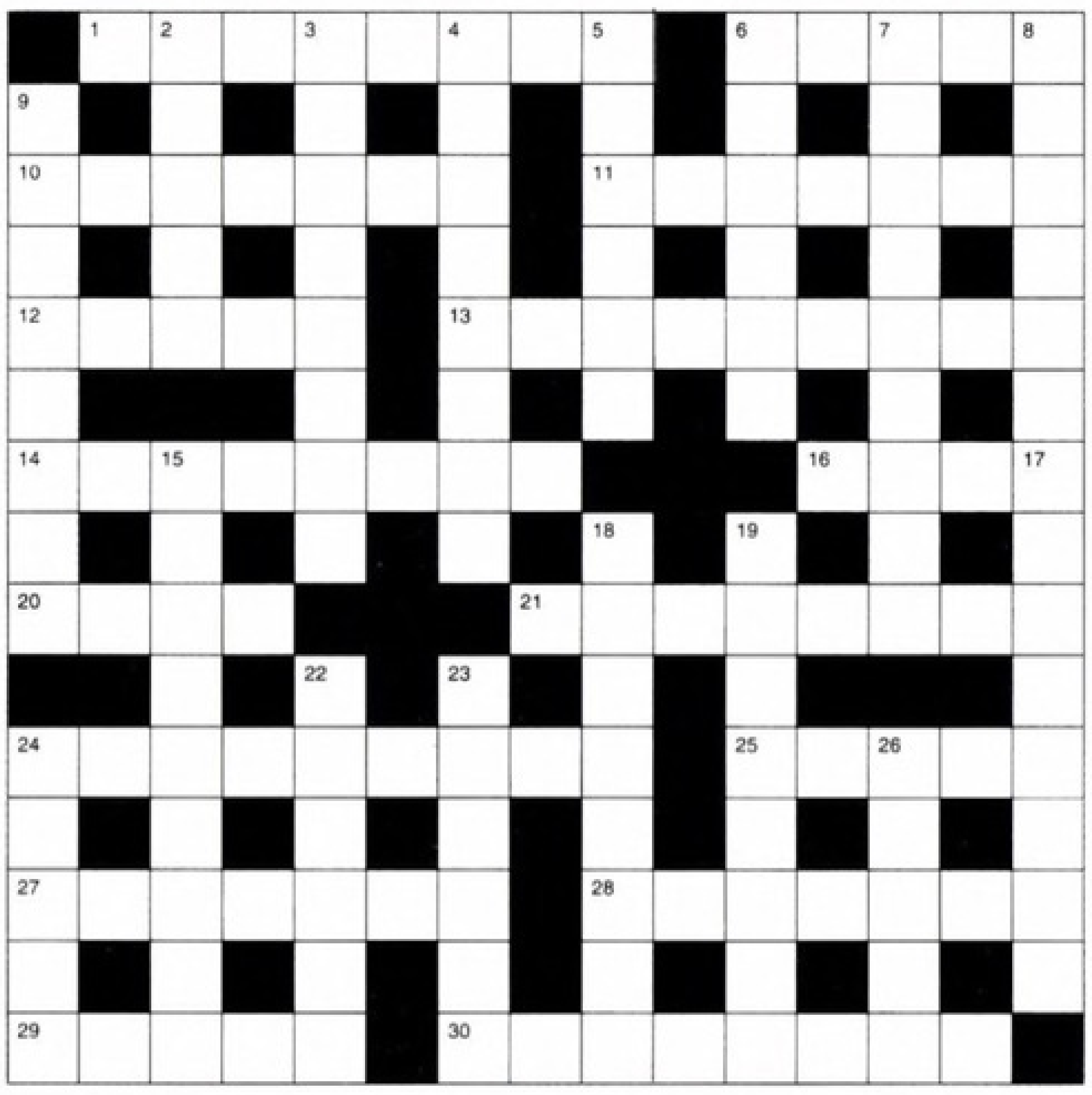
CRYPTIC

Across

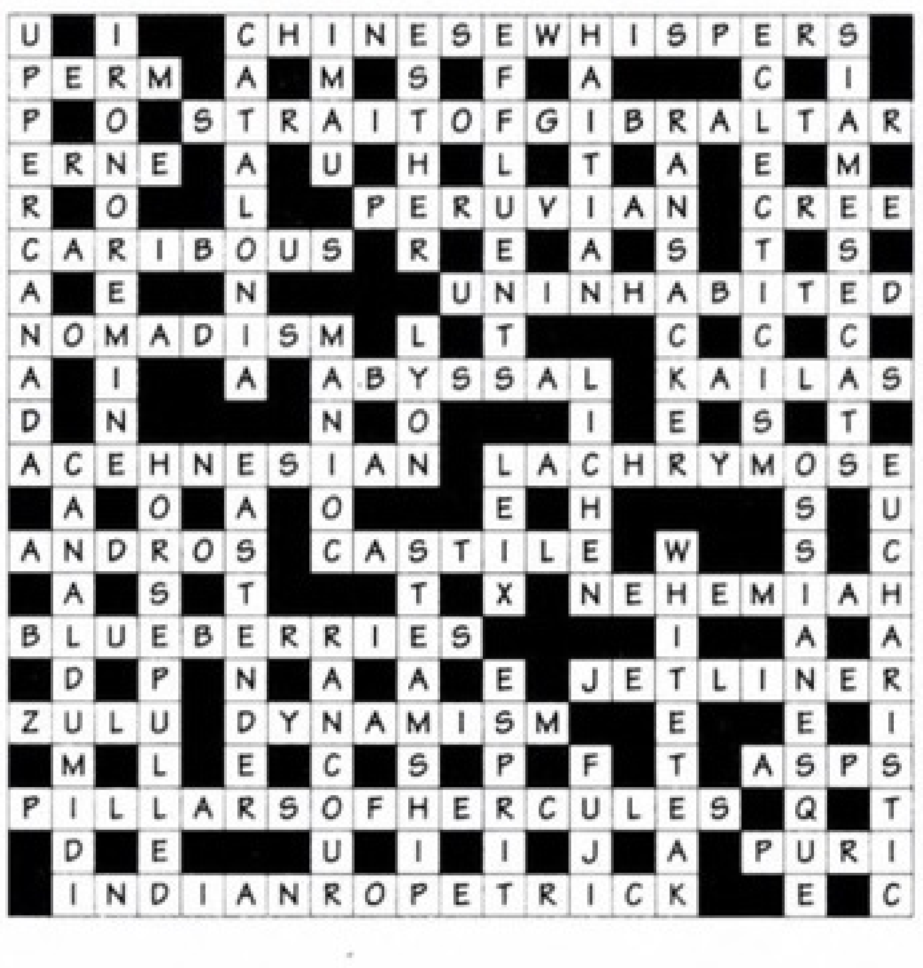
1 Tumbles from Washington high ground! (8)
6 Student has come back, seizing the state of Malaysia (5)
10 Feed and lubricate Madeleine (3,4)
11 Pacific place allows a Pole to go back after currency mix-up (7)
12, 20 States send ship out after the prophet and writer (5,4)
13 The speed you turned to go around collapsed seam may have resulted in 3's dust condition (9)
14 Ocean bird disorientated, lost in canal accident (8)
16 Heather is a salt water type (4)
20 See 12
21 King George in Spanish food disorder – makes one mad and sick (8)
24 Essex town embraces second character from Indiana (5,4)
25 May the French position surrounding South Africa highlight the African (5)
27,6d Implausible Yank using US gold initially to set up Asian democracy leader (4,3,3,3)
28 Axe the Lord used to eradicate (through 3's 9,24d) idle talk? (7)
29 They come from 25, a country in distress (5)
30 The earth moves and stars start to appear when contraceptive is about repaired! (8)

Down

2 Divinity has a hard following altogether (5)
3 Char when explosion below: it exposes black rock (4,4)
4 Crooked tie-up cited to get around treatment to prevent 21? (8)
5 Guide Southern belle to Pennsylvania (6)
6 See 27
7 Baiting used in animal hunting? (9)
8 Saxon invader sounds as if he's losing his voice further (5)
9,24d Well discouraged over cut to 3's face (8,5)
15 On the way back, getting ill around place I haunt in Eastern Europe (9)
17 Rocks Ulster position in scrape over South (8)
18 They wrangle for the mob's people (8)
19 Unpredictable southern climate is a traveller's joy (8)
22 Primate's concerned with both positive and negative factors (6)
23 Herb discards one iron in revolutionary swing (6)
24 See 9
26 Island crawled over by the Hindu (5)



Last month's solution



QUICK

Across

1 Mountain range in north-western US (8)
6 Malaysian province on the island of Borneo (5)
10 Animal feed from rapeseed (3,4)
11 Country named after its latitudinal position (7)
12,20 17th Century Poet Laureate, famous for his 'improvements' to some Shakespeare works (5,4)
13 Collier's lung disease through dust inhalation (9)
14 The world's second greatest area of water, 82.44 million sq km (8)
16 Type of codfish or heather (4)
20 See 12
21 Dietary disease of shrivelled skin and mental deterioration, caused by a lack of Vitamin B2 (8)
24 City of Indiana, on the St Joseph River, established as a fur trading post (5,4)
25 East African tribespeople, nomads of Tanzania and Kenya (5)
27,6d Asian democracy fighter, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 (4,3,3,3)
28 Firedamp or marsh gas (7)
29 Asians with Laotians to the east and Cambodians to the south (5)
30 Fall of earth or rock, usually caused by undermining water (8)

Down

2 The name of God (5)
3 Plant for fuel extraction (4,4)
4 Pertaining to the make-up of the food we eat (8)
5 People of the Nepal/Tibet border (5)
6 See 27
7 Bullying, pestering (9)
8 Hengist and ——, Saxon brothers 'invited' to invade Britain by Vortigen, c450 AD (5)
9,24d Channel in mining passing fresh air from the surface (8,5)
15 European country, 'Lietvos' in its own language (9)
17 Plutonic igneous rocks, comprising mainly quartz, feldspar and micas (8)
18 Vaqueros, drovers (8)
19 Temperate climbing flower of the buttercup family (8)
22 Monkey of the Indian sub-continent whose blood cells have similar properties to humans (6)
23 Plant and herb, related to dill (6)
24 See 9
26 Hindu mystic (5)

ENDPIECE

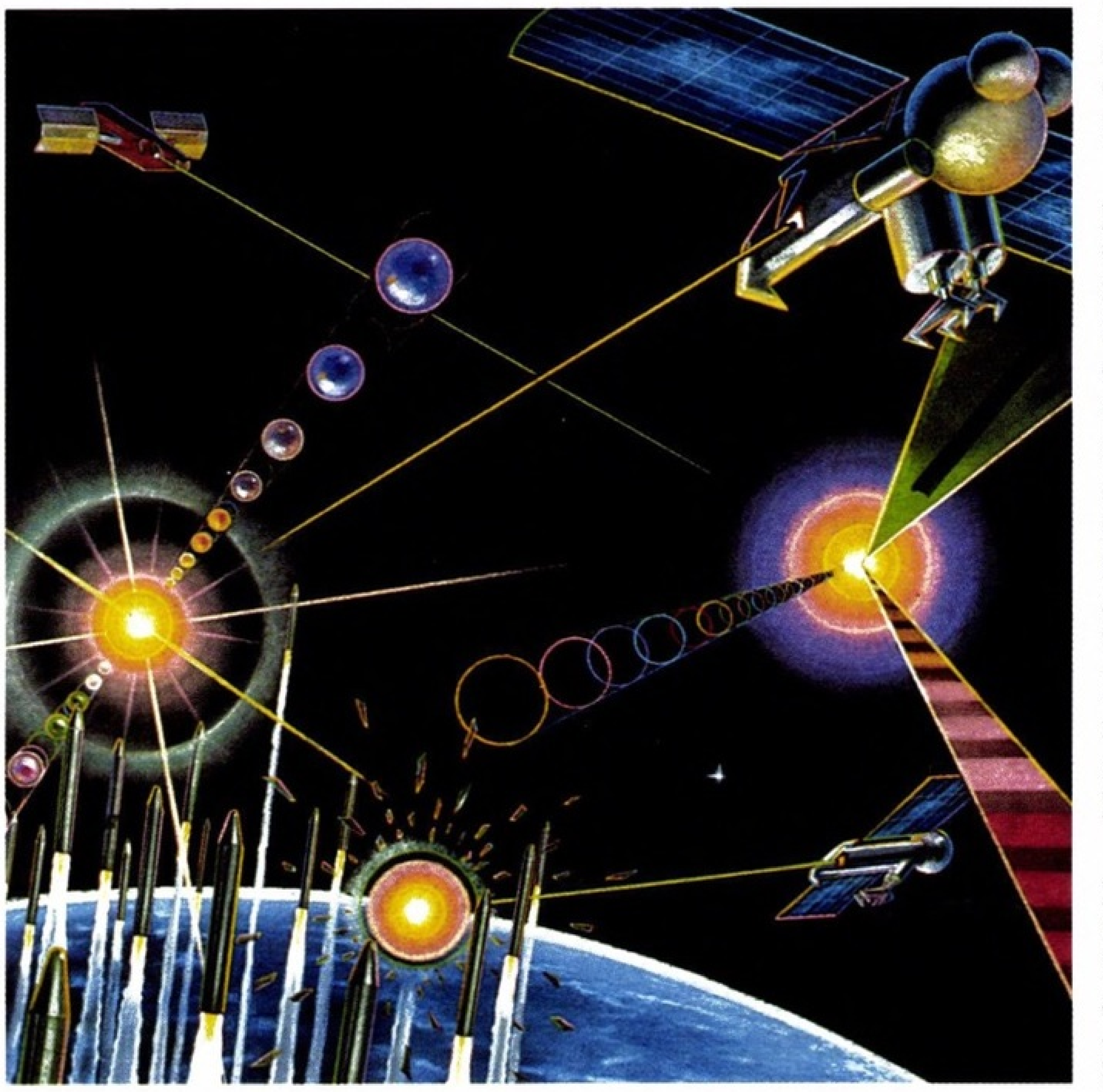
Atomania

The military-industrial complex in the US is alive and still playing with its favourite toy, says **Christian Huot**.

As the world was reminded by the recent South Asian atomic crisis, nuclear intimidation is still very much part of international politics. In North America, too, some people are doing what they can to feed atom mania. Star Wars, the extravagant missile-interception scheme that President Reagan promoted so loudly in the 1980s, might be making a comeback, but this time more quietly.

Beginning in November 1999 for the fiscal year 2000, the Clinton administration will have to decide whether or not to deploy a North American Star Wars system. The administration used not to be too keen on the idea. When it arrived in power it reduced the Star Wars budget dramatically, and last year Secretary of State Madeleine Albright renewed the Anti-Ballistic Treaty with four countries of the former Soviet Union, committing the parties not to deploy national systems.

Among his other travails, however, Clinton now faces strong and growing claims that there is an imminent danger. On 16 July 1998 the Commission to Assess the Ballistic Threat to the US – a congressionally mandated panel – reported that the Government had seriously underestimated the threat from Iran, North Korea and possibly Iraq.


SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY

Although the Commission refused to link its conclusions to the contentious debate over deployment, the Republican congressional leader at the time, Newt Gringrich, called the study 'the most important warning about our national security since the end of the Cold War'. He immediately demanded a bipartisan working group to re-evaluate US intelligence and defence capabilities. In January, a few weeks after the attack on Iraq, suddenly bomb-happy Clinton and the Pentagon asked Congress to approve $7 billion over six years for anti-ballistic defence research and development.

Meanwhile NORAD, the Canadian-American defence organization, claims that the Star Wars project is 'more and more important' and that 'future capacity to counter a ballistic-missile attack... is crucial to a credible security strategy'. The US has suggested that NORAD could manage the project.

At the Pentagon, Colonel Rick Lehner justifies the project by saying that the system 'would mostly allow us to protect our troops in places such as the Middle East or the Korean Peninsula... or against a limited attack by long-distance missiles'. In short, a limited and necessary tool, without the Reagan-era megalomania.

But Bill Robinson, military analyst for Project Ploughshares, an Ottawa-based pacifist group, believes that the project 'makes no sense, given that none of the "rogue" states have ballistic missiles capable of reaching North America'. Normand Beaudet, author of *Le mythe de la défense canadienne* (Écosociété, 1994), suggests we should 'look at what happened to the Iraqi SCUDs in the Gulf War. If they didn't fall in some mudhole, they were easily intercepted by obsolete US Patriots.'

Worse, says Robinson, is that 'the supporters of the technology see it as a first step towards a very elaborate system. Just look at the web site of the Heritage Foundation, a think-tank fairly representative of the right of the US political spectrum. They are shamelessly proposing a fully fledged Star Wars system.' (for details, see http://www.nationalsecurity.org/heritage/issues/chap13.html) Robinson fears that deployment might relaunch an arms race with Russia, with whom the US has, at best, fragile relations.

Beaudet believes that the project 'has always been eccentric, but in the context of the military-industrial complex, that doesn't matter. The US economic system is structured around high technology, which is the centrepiece of American comparative advantage. This industry rests largely on a handful of immensely powerful corporations: General Electric, Westinghouse, Lockheed, Boeing... Most of these companies depend heavily on their military contracts from the Pentagon.'

Beaudet adds that 'the power of the military-industrial complex is not only based in top-level lobbying. US society itself is based on the principle that people have a fundamental right to kill others to protect themselves, so they give huge political influence to the firearms lobby, which is very close to the military industry. Sadly, no politician would ever get elected on an anti-gun platform.'

In June 1998 the Brookings Institution, a private research organization, disclosed the true importance of nuclear weapons to the US military-economic system. In a study billed by the *Washington Post* as 'the first comprehensive audit of the country's effort to build a nuclear arsenal', the Institution revealed that since 1940 the US has spent $5.8 trillion on it. Since their birth, nuclear-weapons programs have made up 29 per cent of all military expenditure and close to 11 per cent of total government spending, ranking ahead of welfare and interest payments on the national debt. Today, nearly ten years after the Cold War, the program still has a $35 billion annual budget.

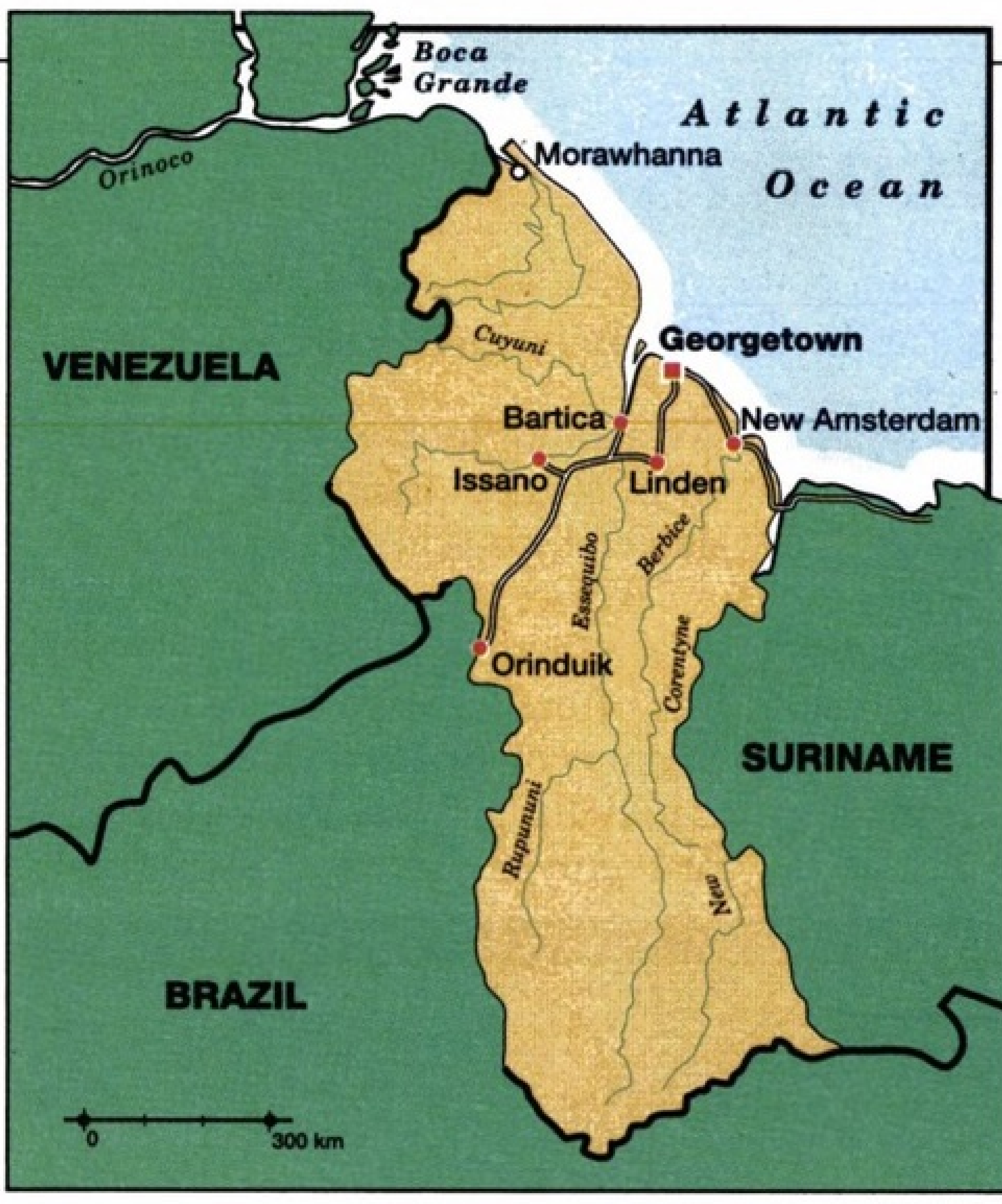
Beaudet says that the Pentagon has a total budget 'that dwarfs even Microsoft's... There are very powerful interests getting large contracts from this organization, and they want to keep things the way they are... Since 1989 the industry has been struggling to find itself a *raison d'être*. We tend to look for rational explanations, but there aren't any. The industry is protecting its interests, that's all. Then it's up to governments to make the sales pitch.' ■

Christian Huot is a freelance journalist living in Montreal.

For further information visit the web site: http://watserv1.uwaterloo.ca/~

Country profile

Guyana



ITEM WORLD GUIDE 1996/97

You either love Georgetown or you hate it. The potholed roads, filthy rubbish-choked gutters and the suspiciousness of the racially divided society put many visitors off. Others are charmed by the rich cultural diversity, the beautiful if poorly maintained colonial wooden buildings and the quick intimacy of social gatherings. Inland the lush rainforests, spectacular waterfalls and 'lost world' table-mountains of the Guiana Highlands are a draw to eco-tourists and adventure travellers. If you're Guyanese, love it or hate it, it's home, but home after uneasy times.

At independence in 1966, Guyana was hailed as the 'jewel of the Caribbean' and its economic prospects seemed bright. But British-colonial and CIA manipulations of the political system – to try to engineer a government friendly to the foreign capital which owned the country's mines and plantations – had fatally damaged its capacity for self-governance. Racial violence and polarized party politics led to power-grabbing and electoral fraud and for 20 years the country was run as a one-party dictatorship.

The institution of 'Co-operative Socialism' in the early 1970s saw foreign capital chased from the country. For a few years, despite cronyism, bureaucratic bloat and chronic financial mismanagement of the new State-run enterprises, the economy grew as world prices for primary commodities boomed. However, oil shocks in the 1970s and the debt crises of the early 1980s put an end to this illusion of growth.

By the mid-1980s, Guyana was bankrupt, the infrastructure wasted, industries run-down, with production of minerals, rice and sugar in serious decline. The social fabric was rent by serious human-rights abuses and growing poverty. Nearly a third of the population, particularly the wealthier and more educated, emigrated, mainly to Canada, Britain and the US.

The international community, which had reluctantly kept the country afloat with 'aid', withdrew support and pressed for political and economic liberalization.

After some false starts, the Government acceded to one of the World Bank and IMF's early experiments with 'structural adjustment'. However, the decaying bauxite mines and run-down sugar estates were hardly tempting prospects for foreign investors, especially as the Government was wary of giving them full control. The World Bank decided that Guyana's future lay in exploiting the deep interior for 'non-traditional exports' – gold, diamonds and timber. The previously 'undeveloped' hinterland was now for sale.

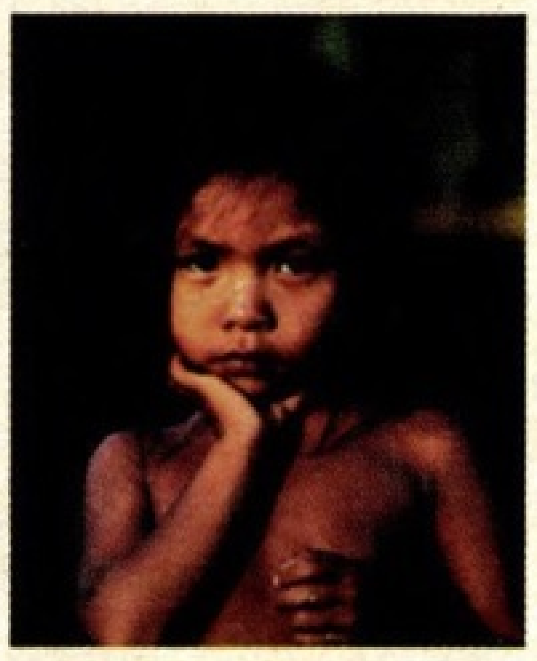
Today, nearly nine million hectares of forests, an area the size of Portugal, are open to pillage by foreign loggers and about a third of the interior has been granted in concessions to foreign miners. Key timber species, like greenheart, are rapidly approaching extinction, while the miners have ruthlessly polluted waterways and scarred the forests. In one disastrous mining 'accident' three million cubic metres of cyanide-laced toxic sludge sloshed into the country's main river from a Canadian gold-mine.

Those to suffer the most from this economic and environmental assault have been the country's 60,000 Amerindians, who live scattered in some 120 small communities in the sparsely populated interior. Increasingly they are speaking out against the destruction of their lands and cultural heritage and recently they sued the Government for failing to respect their land rights.

Guyana has yet to find a 'middle way' between the excesses of foreign-dominated capitalism and the straitjacket of one-party rule in the guise of 'socialism'. The best hope lies in the country's increasingly credible democratic processes. NGOs have been allowed to flourish, the press has regained its freedom and civil society is beginning to assert its right to participate in decision-making. The problem remains that with a national economy wholly dependent on exports and foreign investment, real self-governance is a distant dream. ■

Marcus Colchester

AT A GLANCE



EXPLORER / ROBERT HARDING

Leader: President Janet Jagan.

Economy: GNP per capita $690 (Grenada $2,880, Canada $19,020).

Monetary Unit: Guyana Dollar.

Main exports: Sugar (46%), bauxite (19%), rice (12%), gold (8%), timber.

Main imports: Fuels and lubricants (40%), machinery & transport equipment (12%).

External debt: $1,500 million.

People: 847,000. Pop growth 0.7% per annum.

Health: Infant mortality 59 per 1,000 births (Jamaica 10 per 1,000). Hospitals and rural clinics under-resourced; many trained health workers emigrated in the 1980s.

Culture: A dynamic mix of Afro-Guyanese (36%), 'East Indian' (49%) and Amerindian (7%), with small numbers of Chinese and Portuguese. Around 90% of the population live along the coast, while Amerindians predominate in the sparsely populated rainforests and savannahs of the interior.

Religion: Christians make up about half the population, more Protestant than Catholic, but Hindus (37%) and Muslims (8%) are well established. Religious freedoms are widely respected.

Languages: English is the official language but Hindi and other languages from the Indian sub-continent are also widely spoken. At least nine Amerindian languages are also spoken but there is no state provision for bilingual education.

NI star rating

EXCELLENT	★★★★★
GOOD	★★★★
FAIR	★★★
POOR	★★
APPALLING	★

Sources Marcus Colchester, *Guyana: Fragile Frontier, Latin America Bureau, London 1997; World Development Report 1998; Economic Intelligence Unit; The State of the World's Children 1999, The Americas Review 1998.*

Previously profiled March 1986.

STAR RATINGS

INCOME DISTRIBUTION ★★
Guyana's poor are still desperately poor, especially those in the interior.
1986 ★★

SELF-RELIANCE ★
Guyana remains wholly dependent on trade and aid for its existence.
1986 ★★

POSITION OF WOMEN ★★★
Legally beginning to improve. The current President is a woman. The country hosts off-shore pornographic chat lines as a source of foreign exchange.
1986 ★★

LITERACY ★★★★
98%. Primary-school enrolment is also high, at 94%.
1986 ★★★★

FREEDOM ★★★
Since democracy was restored in 1988, human-rights abuses have lessened and the press is now free. Public democratic participation is still minimal, however.
1986 ★★

LIFE EXPECTANCY ★★
64 years – around ten years lower than most Caribbean countries (eg Trinidad & Tobago 74, Jamaica 75).
1986 ★★★★

POLITICS

NI ASSESSMENT ★★★
The current ruling party, secured by the East Indian vote, was once doctrinaire Marxist but has now uneasily embraced World Bank-style, free-market capitalism. However, public pressure for greater democracy is gradually wearing down the patrician and partisan instincts of the old-fashioned politicians still in power.

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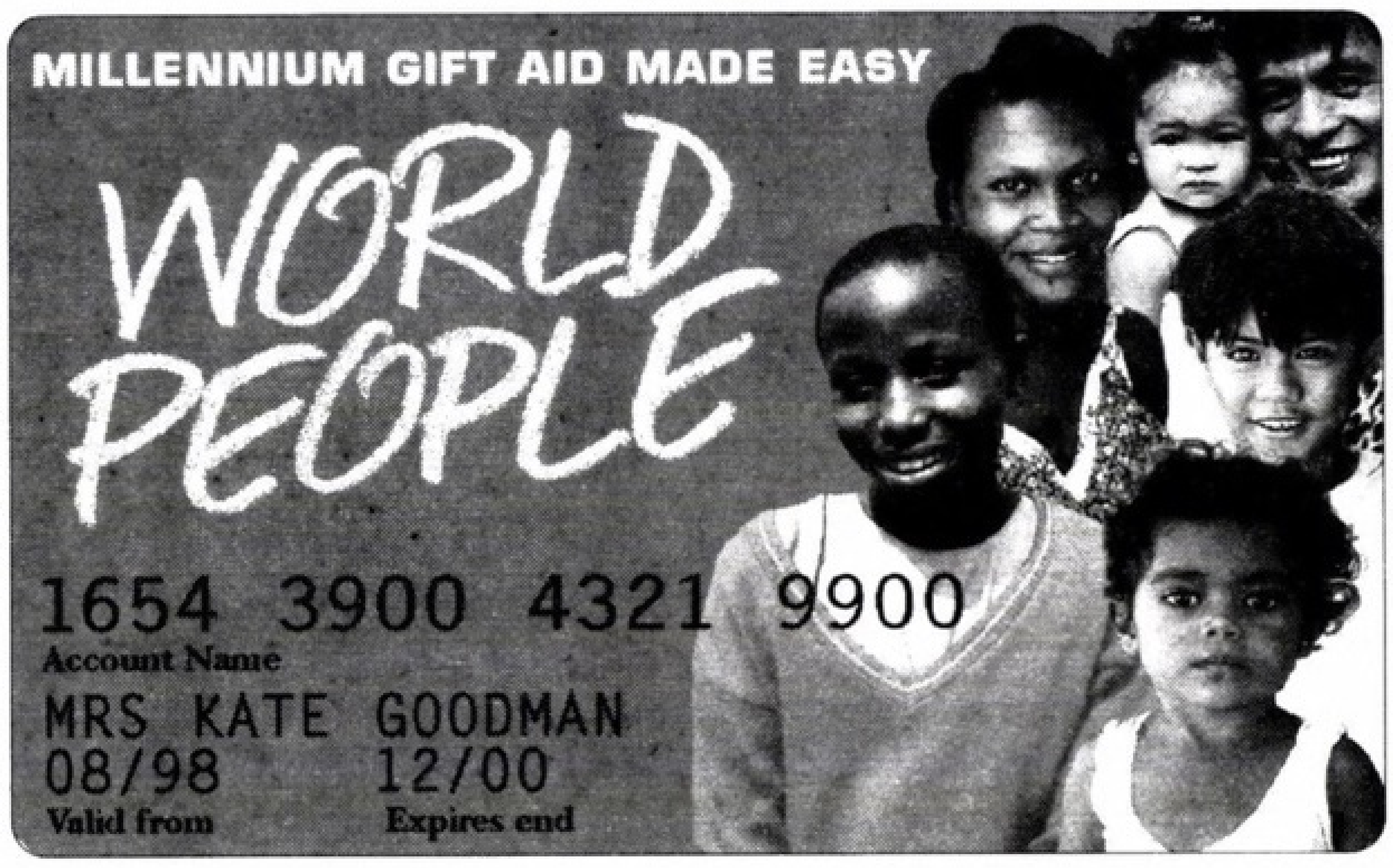

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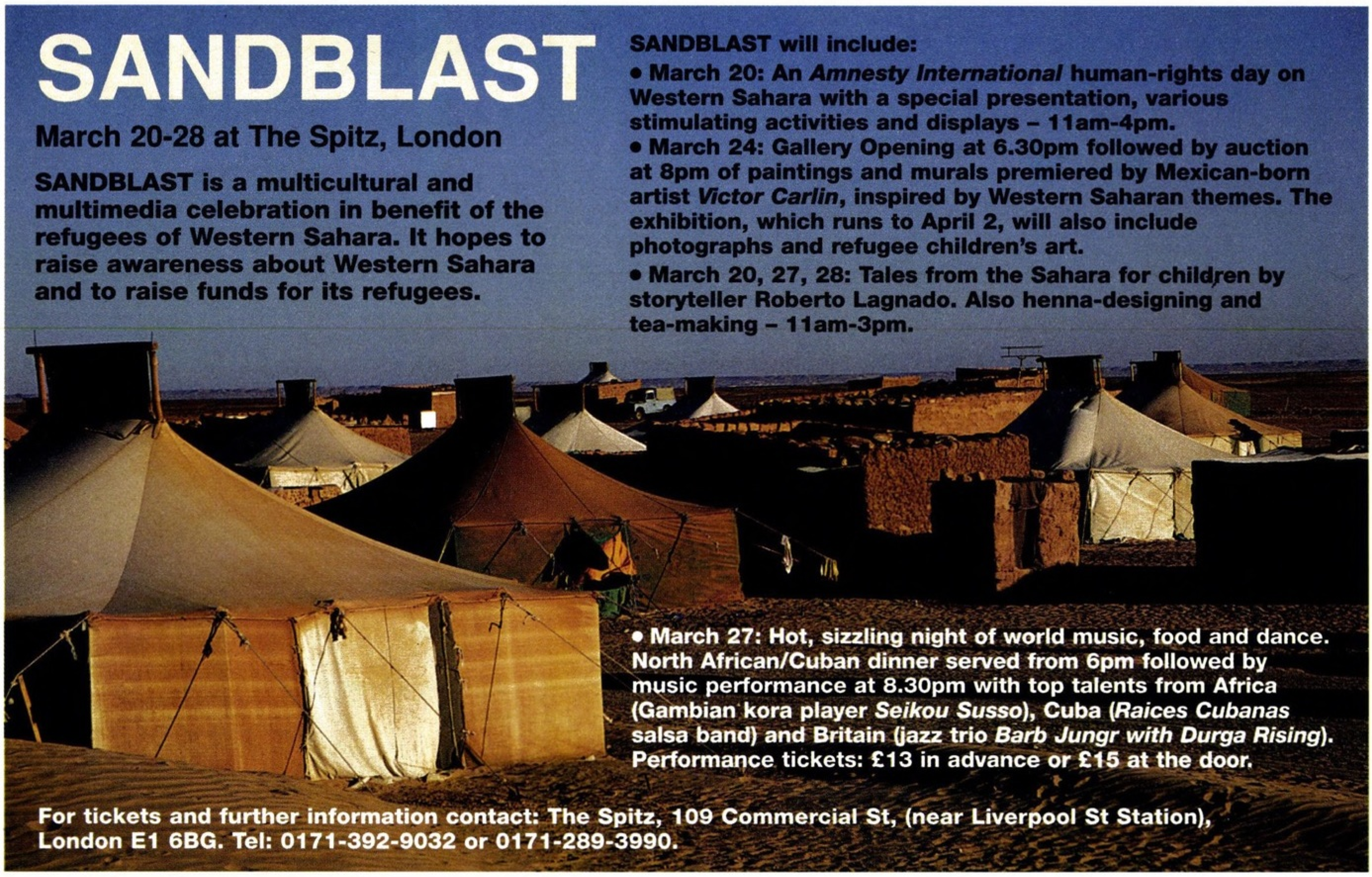

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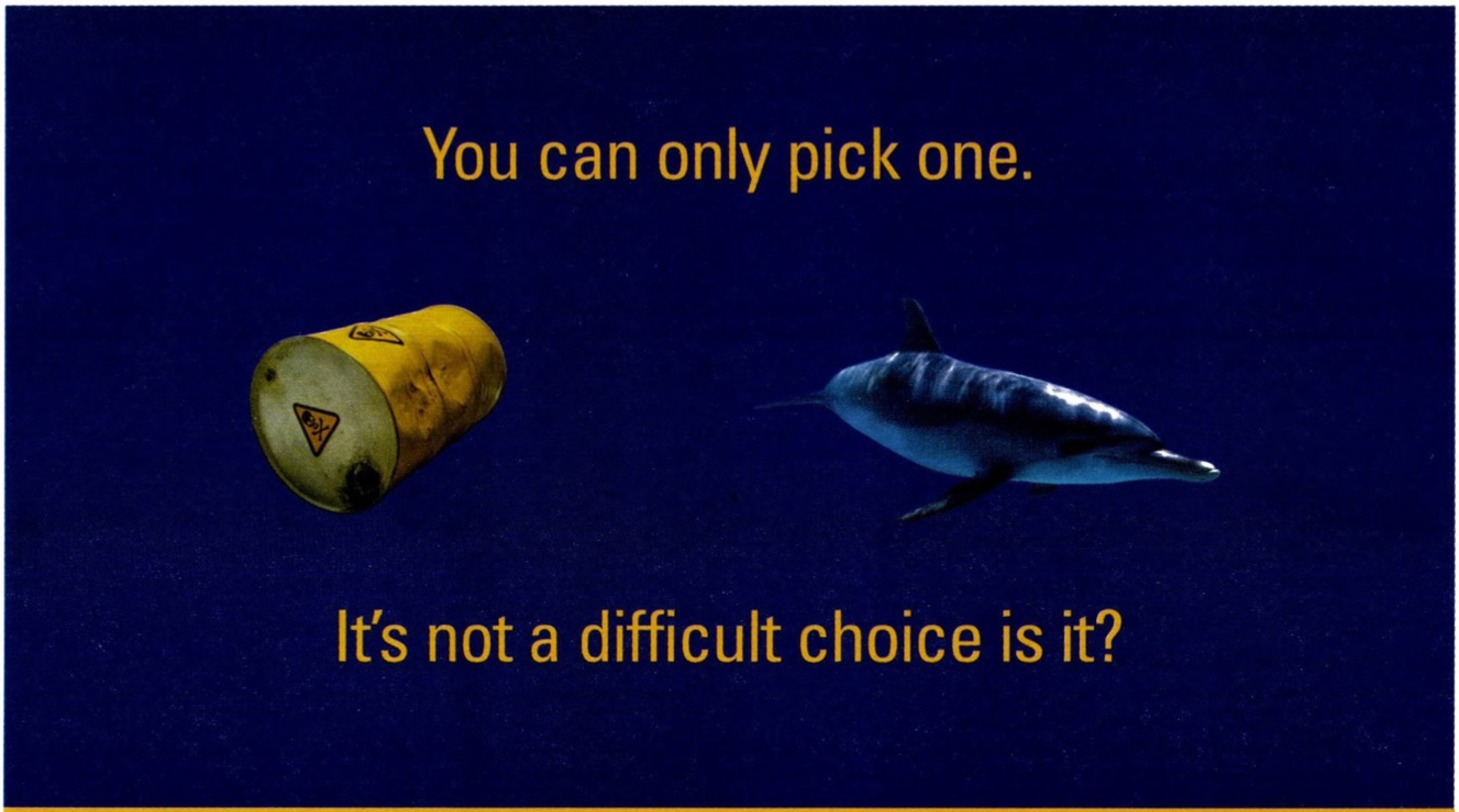
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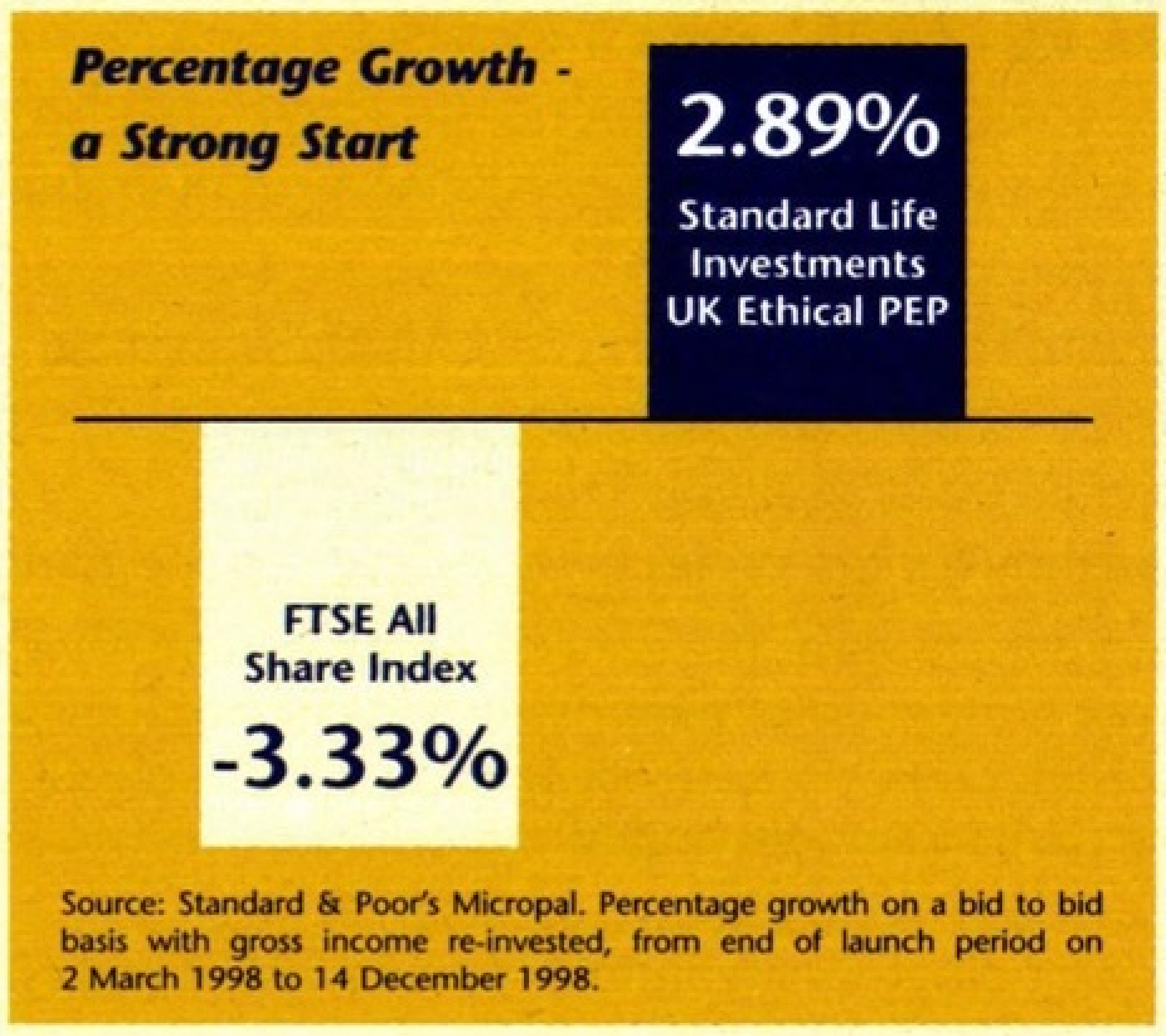

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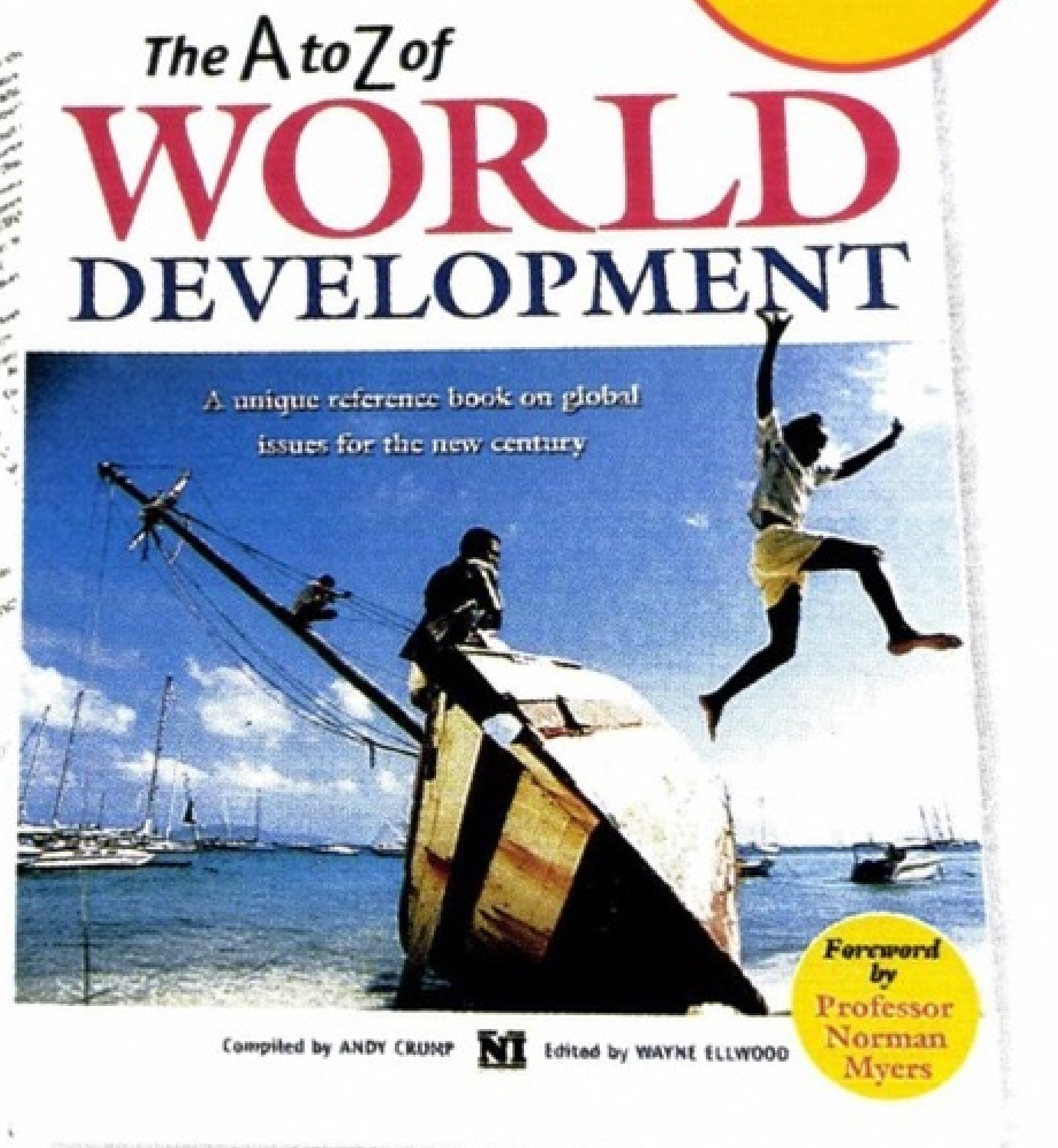
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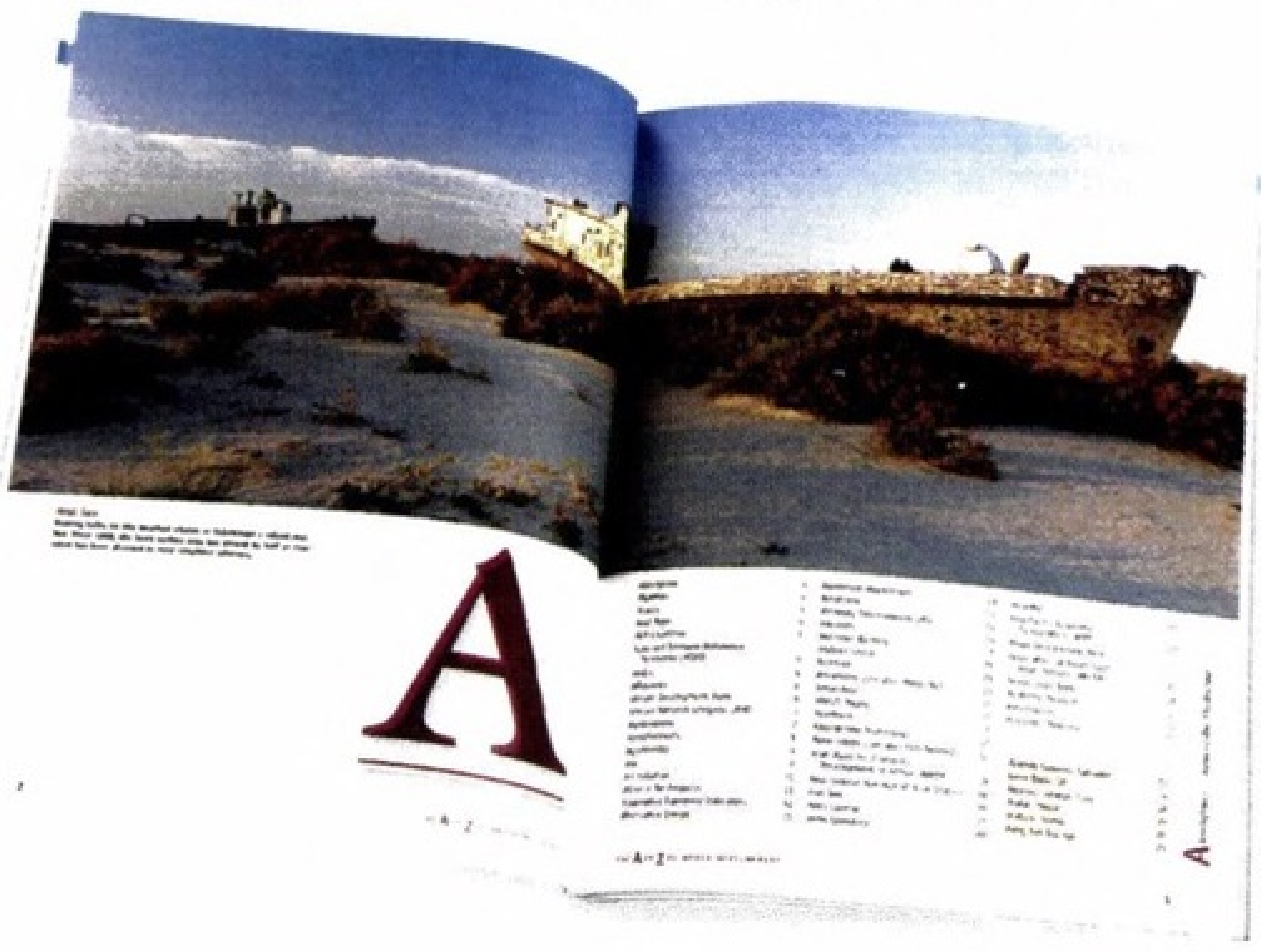

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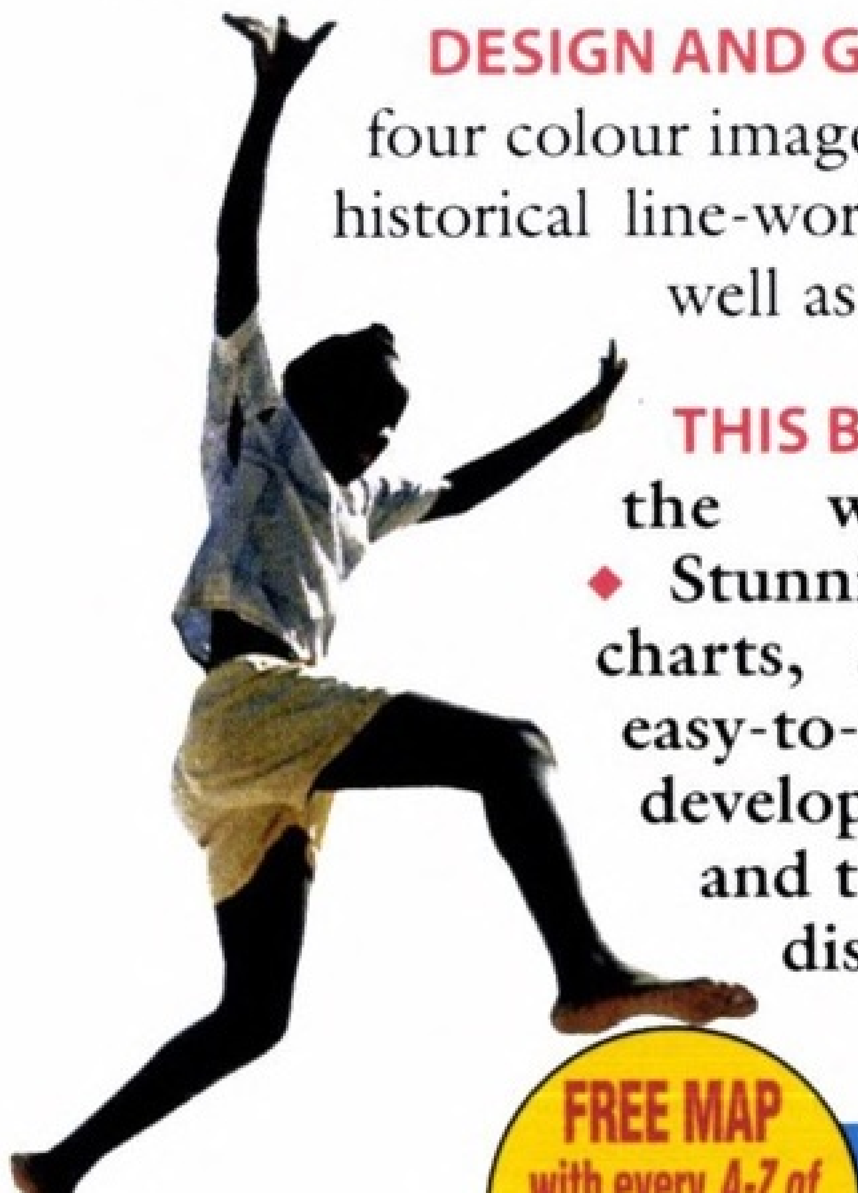

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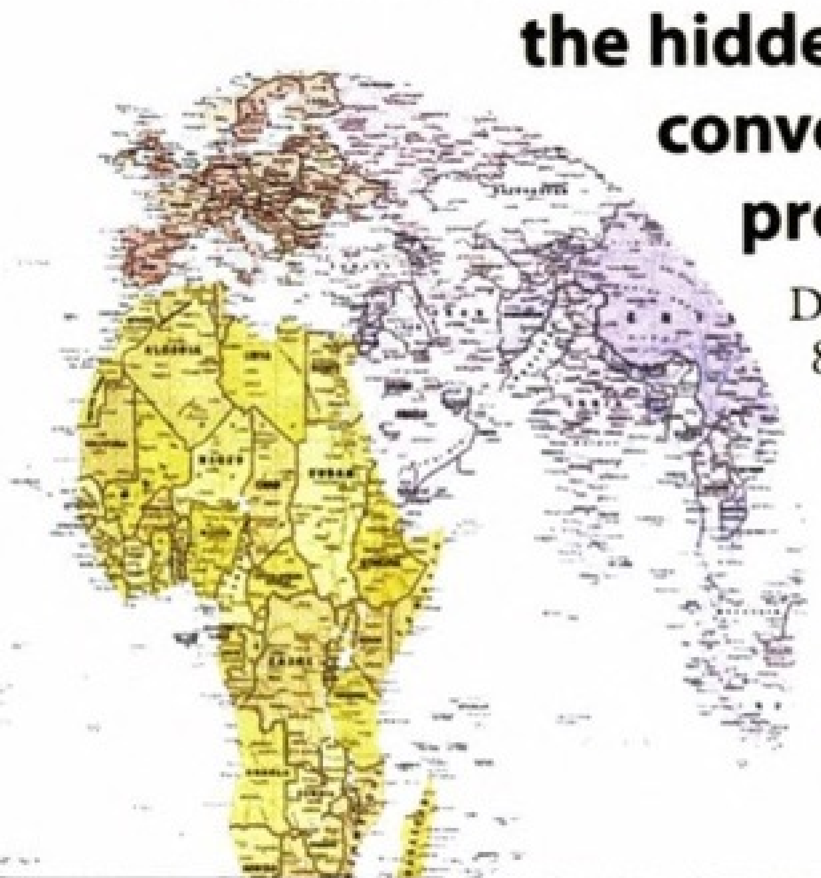

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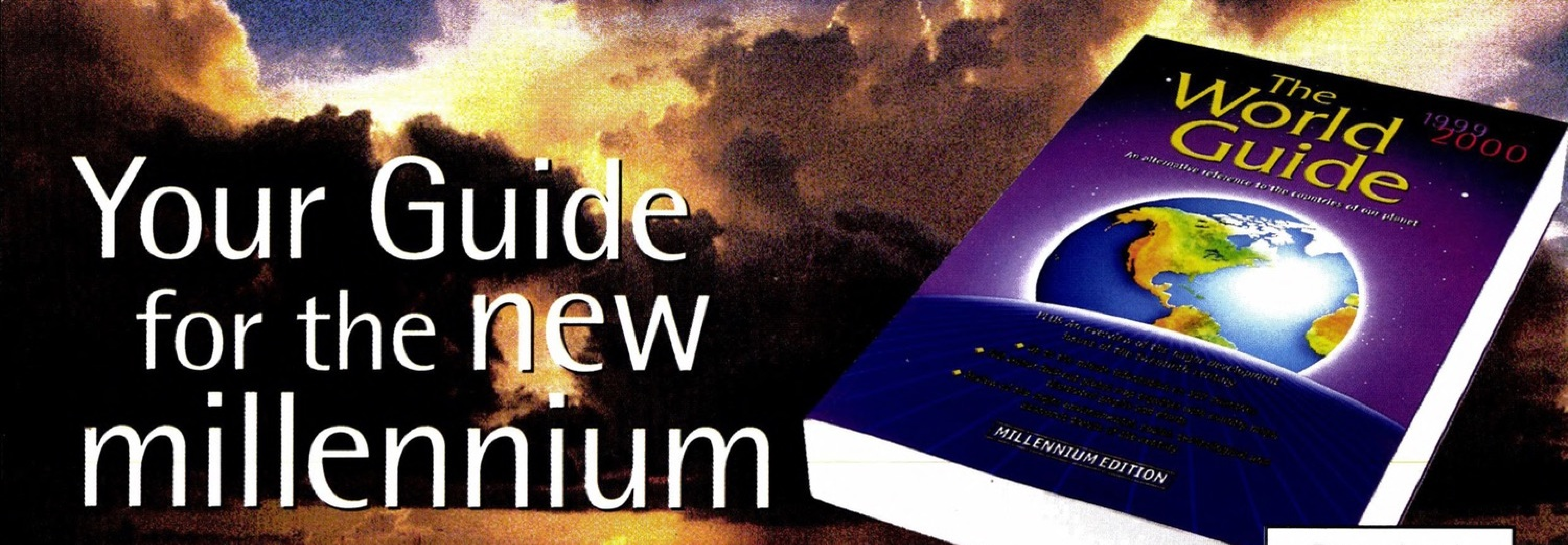

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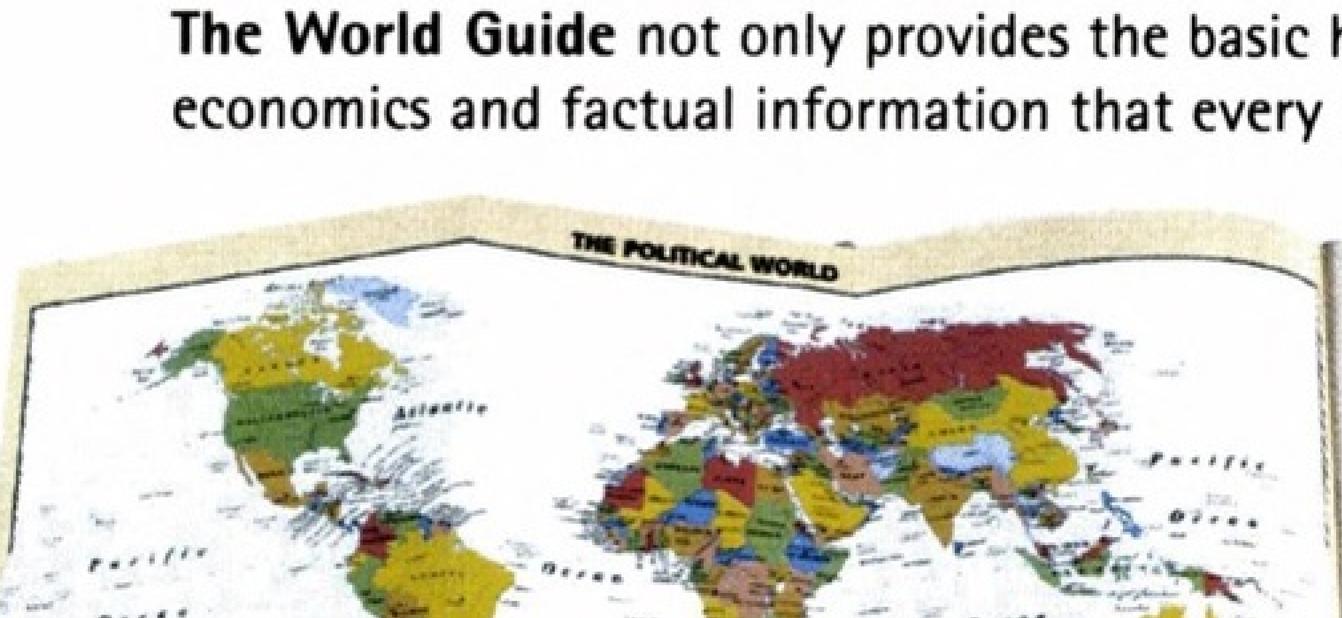

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